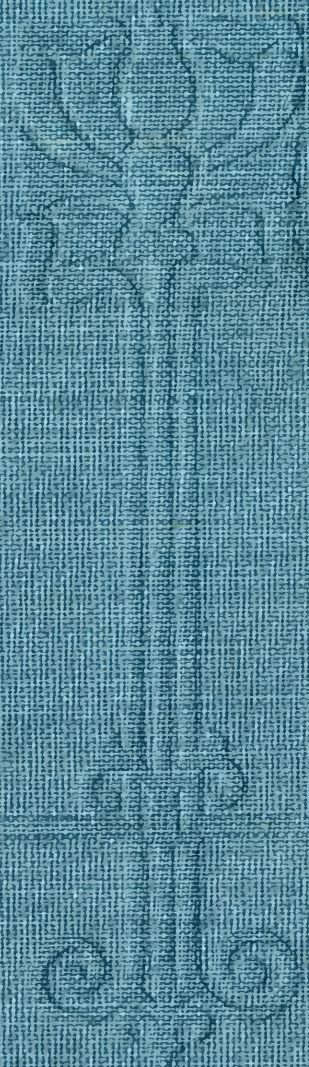


GLADY
AMABEL
ELIZABETH M.
STEWART



In Remembrance,
To Margaret
From Marie

I thought to myself,
I would offer this book
to you,
his and my love
together.

June 15, 1915



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LADY AMABEL

AND

THE SHEPHERD BOY;

OR,

THE RECLUSE OF BYLAND FOREST.

By MISS E. M. STEWART,

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LADY AMABEL AND THE SHEPHERD BOY;

OR,

THE RECLUSE OF BYLAND FOREST

CHAPTER I.

IN very old times, more than four hundred years ago, there stood near the borders of the forest of Byland, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the castle of a great nobleman, called the Baron Fitz-Clavering. This castle was built on a steep hill, and was strongly fortified to resist a military attack, which indeed, in the lifetime of its then possessor, and his father, it had more than once sustained; for the period was one of the most disastrous recorded in English history, being that of the contest between the houses of York and Lancaster, two rival branches of the royal family of Plantagenet. This cruel discord, which for more than sixty years deluged England with the blood of her own sons, was called the "Wars of the Roses," the partizans of York assuming a white rose as their badge, and the adherents of Lancaster a red one.

All the great nobles of the time took part in these wars, taking with them their respective followers into the field, for the law called the "feudal tenure" then prevailed, and by this law, the tenants of an estate, capable of bearing arms, were compelled to follow their lord; who on his part was, in time of peace, equally bound to protect and support his vassals.

The Baron Fitz-Clavering and his father had always supported the house of York, and for some years previous to the opening of our story the baron had lived in great prosperity and splendor in his fine castle; for, after the fatal battle of Tewkesbury, when the Lancastrians were finally defeated, the young Prince of Wales cruelly murdered by Edward the Fourth, and his brother, the Duke of Clarence, the heroic Queen Margaret of Anjou taken prisoner, and her husband, King Henry the Sixth, murdered in the Tower,—the authority of Edward the Fourth was so firmly established, that the harassed country enjoyed an interval of peace.

The Barons Fitz-Clavering had always been such staunch supporters of the house of York, that King Edward would have made them very welcome at his court, where, indeed, the old baron had been a constant visitor. But this old baron was dead, and his son, though a loyal supporter of the cause of King Edward, was no admirer of his rival, but a sensible, religious, and temperate man, who held in abhorrence the dissolute manners of the king and

his courtiers, and who had besides never forgotten the unmanly cruelty of Edward, when, after the battle of Tewkesbury, he struck the brave young Prince of Wales in the face with his heavy steel gauntlet, and thereby gave the signal for his murder. Though as brave a soldier when his services were required, as the great king-making Earl of Warwick himself, the Baron Fitz-Clavering was a man whose character would have befitted a more polished and enlightened age than that in which he lived. His father indeed had been a mere sample of the rude, rough military leader, one who would spend his days in rapine and blood, and his nights over the wine-cup; but his son was a very different character, and after the old baron's death he lived in a certain sort of retirement amid the splendors of Castle Clavering, but throwing wide its gates for the entertainment of any distinguished minstrel or learned clerk, who might pass through the district, and himself superintending the education of his little daughter Amabel.

It was a happy circumstance for this little Lady Amabel that her father differed so much in character from the other fierce nobles of the time, for poor Amabel had lost her mother, and this calamity had occurred under circumstances which were the consequence of the miserable civil war; for, travelling from Castle Clavering to York, with but a small party of attendants, when Amabel was about a year old, the Baroness Fitz-Clavering had encoun-

tered a superior party, armed and equipped with the cognizance of Lancaster. This party attacked her attendants, and it was afterwards surmised that their probable object was to carry off the baroness, and retain her as a hostage for the safety of some of the Lancastrian prisoners, as the chief of the party, while her attendants were engaged with his followers, seized the bridle of her palfrey and was forcing the baroness away, when a random arrow pierced the unfortunate lady to the heart, and she fell dead from her saddle. On perceiving this, the Lancastrian chief uttered an exclamation of disappointment, and calling off his followers, plunged into a wood that skirted the roadside where the encounter had taken place, leaving the attendants of the baroness—several of whom had been killed, and others severely wounded—to attend as best they could to their own hurts and bear off the body of their unfortunate mistress.

All endeavors made by the baron to discover the perpetrators of this cruel deed were fruitless, and it is possible that this lamentable fate of a wife whom he tenderly loved had something to do with the baron's retirement from the world. Meantime the little Amabel, the sole heiress of the castle and the land for miles round it, was brought up amid adulation and observance, that would have quite corrupted an indifferent disposition, and which did not improve a good one.

The observance which attended the rich and

powerful of those days indeed far exceeded anything that modern civilization will admit of, for education is a great leveller of accidental advantages such as those of rank and wealth, and promotes the humblest peasant gifted with virtue and genius, to a position more truly elevated than that of the proudest princes, if these last are ignorant and vicious. The pomps and splendors, indeed, that surrounded Amabel were enough to turn any little female head in the world. Lofty and spacious chambers, hung with beautiful tapestry, the windows filled with stained glass, and even the carved cornice-work and panelling glittering with vermillion and azure and gold. Then the cushions and curtains were of no worse material than velvet and satin, the draperies of her bed were green silk wrought with silver, and a crimson foot-cloth was spread on the floor. Then half a dozen damsels, the daughters of the baron's vassals, were devoted to the service of the young lady, under the direction of Dame Bertha, her nurse, who was far too fond of Amabel to contradict any of her whims, which, luckily for the poor girls her attendants, were not often ill-natured ones.

This kind but foolish old Bertha, indeed, might be said almost to have rocked Amabel's cradle to the tune of the child's worldly importance—certainly, as soon as she could talk, she had been made to understand that she was the only daughter and heiress of the great Baron Fitz-Clavering; that the grand

castle, with its spacious rooms and costly furniture within, and its long-extended walls and frowning towers without, was one day to be hers, with all the beautiful fields and woods that surround it for many a mile. Then how was the pride of Amabel's heart fostered when she rode out on her white palfrey, with its silken trappings, and a page running on either side, and her nurse and her maidens and half a score of grooms and serving men in attendance.

Amabel was not naturally selfish, but over-indulgence had made her so, and as she was very passionate and proud, the poor girls whose duty it was to wait on her led anything but a pleasant life; for it was not a present of a new ribbon or a silver bodkin for their hair that would always make them amends for a slap on the face, or the railing of her sharp little tongue, when Amabel was in an ill-humor.

It may be thought that so wise and good a man as the Baron Fitz-Clavering would have perceived and corrected Amabel's serious faults; but the most virtuous among rich people live in a kind of delusion, and seldom really know either themselves or others, as they are surrounded with flatterers, who hinder any honest person, if such by chance approaches them, from speaking the truth. Add to this, that Amabel was, with all her faults, very clever and very affectionate; and she learned to play on the lute, and to speak French, and to embroider with threads of silk and gold, with great readiness, not only because she was so clever, but that she

loved her father, and knew that her progress would give him pleasure.

Thus at eleven years of age Amabel was very accomplished, and also very proud and tyrannical.

I have said that Clavering Castle was in the district of Byland Forest. In those days, four hundred years ago, the forests of England, which have now almost wholly disappeared, were very thick and extensive, and infested not only by wild animals, but by bands of robbers. In the fastnesses of these forests many of the unfortunate adherents of either party frequently took refuge during the calamitous wars of the Roses. But Edward the Fourth was now firmly established on the throne, the fortunes of Lancaster seemed wholly destroyed, the more distinguished supporters of the Red Rose, among whom was the young Earl of Richmond, afterwards Henry the Seventh, had withdrawn to France, and the humbler partizans, whether in town or country, were fain to submit quietly to the existing government. Hence it was that when the huntsmen and falconers of the Baron Fitz-Clavering spoke of the stern and melancholy man whom they had found residing in a rude hut, which he had himself formed of twisted loughs, in one of the deepest recesses of Byland Forest, they supposed him to be some enthusiast fulfilling one of the religious vows of seclusion, which were not uncommon in those days.

This man, who was known in the district by the old Saxon name of Siward, had with him a boy

about a year or two older than the Lady Amabel, and the desolate condition of this poor child, whom his gloomy father treated with great severity, had awakened for him the pity even of the rude and warlike retainers of the Baron Fitz-Clavering. Under the influence of this feeling of compassion, the baron's head falconer had made to Siward what he considered the very liberal proposal of taking the boy, who was called Edwin, under his own charge, and instructing him in all the duties of falconry,—a proposal which Siward so violently and fiercely rejected, that a less good-natured man than Roger, the chief falconer, would have regretted having made it. As for Roger, he contented himself with saying that he meant no offence, and that he wished Edwin might never do worse than enter the service of so noble a master as the Baron Fitz-Clavering, and then withdrew. In the forest, however, he encountered poor Edwin, whose looks of disappointment when he found that Roger's kind offer had been refused by his father sorely pained the worthy falconer.

The story, meanwhile, of this poor Edwin and his harsh father made way from among the baron's retainers to the serving-damsels of his daughter, and was finally told to the little Lady Amabel, in her bower-chamber, one evening when she lay stretched on her silken cushions, in a very ill-humor, and refusing to taste any of the delicate cakes and confections which nurse Bertha had been at the trouble

of preparing with her own hands, because the weather had been wet that afternoon, and she had been hindered trying the paces of a new palfrey, a beautiful Spanish jennet which her father had presented to her the day before.

Emma and Gillian, her two principal maidens, were talking of the Recluse of the Forest and his poor boy, over their embroidery frames, and the young lady, after scolding first because their whispers annoyed her, next demanded to know what they were talking about.

Amabel had a kind heart, and she shed tears when Gillian told her how, the preceding winter, Siward and his son had almost perished with hunger and cold in their miserable hut; how the courage and endurance of the poor boy, who amid the snows and bitter cold had made his way to the town nearest to the borders of the forest, and procured relief by the sale of baskets and mats which he had twisted of osiers, had alone preserved the life of a father whose harsh temper made his own young life a very miserable one.

Amabel was very angry with this cruel father, and wept over her delicate viands when told that the poor boy could not procure dry bread, and finally retired to rest, full of a charming scheme to make Edwin's lot as happy as her own; for the proud little lady never dreamt that Siward would refuse to part with his son when she demanded that he should do so.

She did not, meantime, in the fashion which would have been adopted by an humble-minded little girl, wait to make her design known to her father—no, forsooth, she must have all the glory and honor of the adventure to herself. So, like an imperious little queen, Amabel issued her orders, before she went to bed, that her new Spanish palfrey should be saddled, and all her attendants, her maids, and her pages, and her grooms, ready to wait on her to the forest, so soon as her ladyship had breakfasted the following morning.

Nurse Bertha was to go to the buttery too, and load a large basket with capons and tongues and white bread, not forgetting a venison pasty; moreover, she was to get a pitcher of Bordeaux wine from the sewer, and another of sherris sack; for Amabel was told that this cross old Siward was very ill, and she thought the good things might comfort him, and perhaps improve his temper.

Her father, the Baron Fitz-Clavering, be it observed, was absent from his castle, and was not expected home till the following evening, by which time Amabel flattered herself with preparing for him a splendid surprise, in exhibiting herself as a little model of Christian charity, for we know not what fantastic scheme Amabel had formed respecting this poor boy Edwin. Perhaps she did not altogether understand her own purpose herself; only one thing was certain, that she expected to find the boy Edwin as submissive and contented a recipient of her bounty

as the dog which she pampered with dainties from her table.

Whether Edwin was of a disposition to accept favors so conferred, we shall soon learn.



CHAPTER II.

WHILE Amabel went to bed in high good humor and slept peacefully, in the conscious determination to do what she really meant to be a kind action, Edwin was sorrowfully traversing the forest paths, bending under the weight of a load of wood, which he had collected for fuel. How different was the lot of these two children. Edwin condemned to live in a mean hut, which if, thanks to the umbrageous boughs of the forest, it excluded the heats of summer, was but an indifferent shelter from the winter's cold ; instead, too, of the garments of velvet and silk, made richer with costly embroidery that heightened up the childish beauty of Amabel, poor Edwin had but a tunic of grey frieze, girt about the waist with a leathern girdle. No delicate food, no submissive attendants had he, but a stern, harsh father, who, though the boy toiled incessantly at wood-cutting, plating osiers, catching fish, or any other means to procure a trifle for their mutual support, never even gave him the poor return of a kind word or a look of approval. Yet, in spite of all this, Edwin was patient, if not cheerful, under his hard lot ; he never suffered from the fits of ill-temper which so often made Amabel unhappy ; and if by chance he could obtain Siward's permission to visit any of

the neighboring villages on a feast day, he derived much more pleasure in joining in the rustic dance upon the green, than Amabel did from all the pomps and luxuries which were at her daily command. As he approached the little hut in which he lived with his father, poor Edwin sighed, and casting his heavy load of wood at the foot of a tree, he sat down to rest, and consider whether he might venture to make known to his father a proposal which had been that day made to him by a worthy farmer on the borders of the forest.

The rain, which had so much ruffled Amabel's temper by preventing her ride on her Spanish palfrey, had now ceased, and the sun, breaking through the light clouds that still floated across the sky, threw a yellow radiance on the forest, now dressed in the fresh green robe of early summer, and spangled with flowers. As the long lines of light, too, darting between the trunks of the tall trees, fell upon the hut of the recluse, it did not seem so dreary a habitation. The spot, indeed, had not been ill-chosen; an opening in the forest, where the ground, clothed with turf smooth and green as a well-kept lawn, sloped down in a gentle declivity to the banks of a rapid stream, which, after meandering for some miles through the forest, joined its waters to those of the river Ribble, near Clavering Castle. At the further extremity of this natural lawn stood Siward's hut. It was built of uneven boughs, but a thick moss had crept over the roof,

and the walls were almost covered with woodbine and with honeysuckle, which Edwin had planted; while at the foot of the lawn, and facing the cottage, flowed the bright stream, bordered with thickets of the wild briar rose and hawthorn, now covered with pink and white blossoms, which scattered a sweet odor on the passing breeze.

Poor Edwin, he tasted very bitterly the sufferings of poverty. The rich will sometimes have the cruelty to say that the poor are used to their privations. Used to the absence of luxury they may be, but no one can become used to exceeding toil, or extreme hunger, or to shiver in the winter's blast, or pant beneath the heats of summer. All this suffering by turns had Edwin endured, and, as he thought how light and pleasant would be his employ, and how secure his reward, in tending the flocks of good farmer Norbert, he almost forgot his sadness and fatigue, and, shouldering again his load of wood, he crossed the green sward to the hut.

Old Siward, as he was called in the district, though he had really not much passed the middle stage of life, was a man of gaunt and almost savage appearance; but it was a career of mingled riot and misery, and not the lapse of years, which had so thickly sprinkled with grey the elf locks which hung in tangled masses about his haggard face; it was sorrow, and perhaps sin, which had ploughed those deep furrows in his brow, and made his eyes glare so wildly over his pale and hollow cheeks. Siward

had never completely recovered from the illness he had in the winter, and when Edwin approached the cottage, he found him sitting, with a look of pain and weariness, at the door.

Not all Siward's ill-temper could turn against him the affectionate heart of Edwin; besides, this stern father was, after all, the only creature whom the poor boy had to love. Seeing, then, that he was suffering more than usual, Edwin hastened to his side, and throwing down the wood, hastened to produce, from a leathern bag which was slung at his shoulder, some provisions which had been given to him by dame Alison, the good wife of farmer Norbert. There were slices of cold meat and white bread, and a bottle of new milk; and because Edwin had said that his father was sick, there was the breast and wing of a roasted capon, and half a flask of wine—very choice and rare wine, as the dame had assured Edwin, and excellent for sick people, as it was a portion that remained of some that the fathers of the monastery of St. Aldhelm had given her when her children were sick in the winter; for farmer Norbert was a tenant of the church, and among the other advantages which he had promised Edwin on entering his employ, was the probable notice of some of the monks. The almoner of the monastery had, indeed, more than once, visited Siward's hut, but his spiritual consolation and offers of physical aid had been alike rejected with a kind of insane ferocity. If, indeed, Siward had been a great sinner, he was not yet by

any means a penitent one, having more than once previously, forbidden his son to visit the monastery. Certainly his seclusion was not the effect of a religious vow.

Though evidently more indisposed than usual, Siward did not on this day exhibit his customary violence of temper, but was pleased to partake of the delicacies bestowed by dame Alison, without resenting her bounty as if it were an affront. A cup of the good wine, too, helped to revive him, and there was almost a smile on his grim countenance, as, when their repast was over, he took his station again at the cottage door, with Edwin by his side, to watch the declining sunbeams. At last, Edwin ventured to name the proposition of farmer Norbert, which Siward heard without any of those vehement bursts of disapproval with which he had been accustomed to reject any scheme of the boy for procuring employment. The unwonted smile, indeed, passed away from his face, but it was rather in a sad than an angry tone that he said, when Edwin having made known to him Norbert's proposals, paused for a reply:

"In sooth, Edwin, my poor boy, I know not what answer to give thee. It is a hard and weary life thou leadest here in our poor hut, and well I ween that I have been called cruel, that I condemned thee to lead it—ay, not only by the saucy jack troopers and flaunting lackeys of my lord the Baron Fitz-Clavering, but by the fathers of St. Aldhelm's, and

It may be, Edwin, sometimes by thyself. But the nut with a hard shell has not always a bitter kernel, Edwin; and it may be I care more for thee and thy true interests at heart, than many a father who would have spoken thee always with a smooth tongue and a smiling lip. Alack, Edwin, my boy, it should not be for thee to ride a horse-boy in the train of the misproud partizans of bloodthirsty York, or to patter Latin among the shaven monks, or loiter away thy young days in watching the wanderings of the silly sheep—it was not for any of these things that thou wast destined at thy birth; and thou hast not yet years enough over thy head, Edwin, for me to tell thee why it is unfitting that thou shouldst do these things. Still I may not gainsay the truth, that another winter like the last, and we shall both die of hunger and cold. I know not what to bid thee, Edwin; never will I consent that thou bend a vassal's knee to any baron of them all, and thou hast foes, boy, for whom it would pass all other triumphs to see thee don the habit of a monk. Alack! alack! among these bad chances, the least of the bad is even for thee to watch the poor sheep; the quiet things will have neither the sense to offend, nor the power to harm thee. Yes, Edwin, I give thee my consent; for the passing time, at least, thou must be a shepherd boy!"

Edwin's delight at thus unexpectedly obtaining Siward's assent to his entering the service of Norbert, was almost too great to be expressed by words,

but, as if malicious destiny grudged to him even a temporary gleam of enjoyment, his pleasure was suddenly converted into alarm by seeing Siward suddenly become of a livid paleness, and fall back in a swoon. Edwin had seen his father suffer in this manner before; but the present fit was of long duration, and the affectionate Edwin, while his tears fell on the pale face, reproached himself that he had not long before braved the chance of his father's anger, and accepted some employment which would have enabled him to procure for him the comforts necessary to his failing health.

During the whole of that night Siward remained so ill, that Edwin feared to leave him, even in search of assistance, lest he should die in his absence. The following morning, however, he appeared better, and Edwin rejoiced to find that he still appeared content with his proposed plan of obtaining employment, was about to set out for the dwelling of Norbert, when he perceived a gay cavalcade winding along the steep banks that overhung the river, before it descended to the valley or glen, at the head of which stood the hut. The generous heart of Edwin was far above being moved with the base passion of envy, yet he could not repress a sigh as he glanced from those gaily-equipped riders to the bare walls of the hut, and the miserable pallet on which his father lay; how many comforts might he not have procured for his sick parent, even with the cost of the silken and embroidered trappings of that

prancing palfrey, while the gems that sparkled on the person of its rider would have been to him a fortune. On, meanwhile, with the white feather in her cap waving to the morning wind, and her robes of silk and velvet, glittering with gold embroidery and glowing with the varied tints of the tulip, came the little Lady Amabel, for she was the rider, bound on her errand of charity. Edwin having again bidden his father farewell, with a promise of returning with all possible speed, was about to plunge into the deep wood paths which led to that boundary of the forest where lay the farm of Norbert, when he perceived that the strangers were approaching the cottage, and indeed Amabel was now sufficiently near to make known, by a most imperious gesture and tone, that she wished to speak with him. Edwin paused at her request, but it was neither in obedience to her imperative voice, nor in awe at the splendor of her appearance and the number of her attendants, though the vain little girl thought that his patient and silent bearing was the effect of both. Amabel had not yet lived long enough in the world to know that base and vulgar minds alone are awed by the aspects of wealth, or to feel that the respect which is paid to it is a mere insult to its possessor, since it is the work of the poor silkworm, the glittering stones and yellow ore dug from the bowels of the earth, that are the real objects of admiration. This salutary lesson she was soon to be taught by

Edwin, who was therein to prove the best friend, after her father, that she had yet possessed.

Amabel was accustomed to so many foolish flatteries from her attendants, and had in her so little of the real spirit of kindness, that she was in some sort displeased by the frank and independent air with which Edwin stood waiting for her at the door of his cottage. To tell the truth, indeed, Amabel had arrayed herself in all her splendor. The trappings of her palfrey were of crimson and gold, her own robes of sky-blue silk wrought with silver, the feather in her cap was fastened with an ornament of diamonds, and a long veil, the distinctive attire, in those days, of ladies of rank, streamed over her shoulders, and was made of fine gauze wrought with silver and bordered with pearls. Then, besides the lackey who carried on his horse the basket with the provisions for the poor recluse, she had in her train two pages, as many grooms, four waiting damsels, and of course her doting nurse. All these attendants rode fine horses, and were dressed and equipped in a manner befitting the rank and wealth of the Baron Fitz-Clavering. Can we imagine the surprise of Amabel, as she drew the reins of her palfrey before the entrance of the hut, and glanced approvingly from her own costly attire to the coarse frieze tunic of Edwin—can we imagine her surprise that he should seem in no way humbled, either by her splendor or his own poverty? After all, however Edwin in his coarse garments was at least as impos-

ing as Amabel in her jewels and silks. He was naturally tall for his years, and the hardy life he had led had given both vigor and grace to his person; his features, too, were remarkably handsome, and health was in the hue of his embrowned cheek and the sparkle of his dark eyes, and beyond this beauty of form, his face possessed the rarer one of expression; the sweetness of his smile, the modest confidence of his gaze, the smooth expanse of his broad open brow, gave promise of a candid and generous soul.

Amabel, however, spoiled by adulation, had expected in this poor boy a sorrowful and cringing demeanor, she wished to relieve his sufferings, but it must be with a grand display of her own importance; and since neither her retinue nor her finery seemed to have produced this effect, she imagined it might be compassed by a haughty announcement of her name and condition. While her beautiful white palfrey, therefore, stood before the door of the hut, tossing his head and pawing the earth, with a pride almost equalling that of his rider, and her attendants drew up respectfully in the background she looked askance at Edwin, and, tossing her head as if taking a lesson from the poor animal, the palfrey, she exclaimed: "Do you not know who I am?" Then, without waiting for a reply, she added, with an air of swelling importance, "I am the Lady Amabel, the daughter of the Baron Fitz-Clavering; the Lord Fitz-Clavering has no child but me, and I

shall be the Baroness Fitz-Clavering, a peeress in my own right; and Castle Clavering will be mine, and, oh! hundreds and hundreds of vassals, and all the land on the north of the forest,—oh, for miles and miles it will be mine; and other lands and castles too, and money and jewels;—oh, I shall be very rich; I am very rich!”

Amabel spoke so loud and fast in enumerating her own riches and dignities, that she was fain to pause for breath; and perceiving that Edwin still stood unabashed before her, but with a slight smile, the meaning of which, as far as she understood it, she did not altogether like, hovering on his lip, a little anger began to mix with her surprise; so she repeated: “Do you hear, I am very rich,—don’t you wish you were rich?” “I don’t know that I care to be rich,” answered Edwin, with a smile; “I certainly wish I was not quite so poor.”

“Ah, you are very, very poor; I know that,” said Amabel; “our people have told me all about you, and I am very sorry for you;—it must be very sad to be so poor!”

The little girl had not an unkind heart—it was flattering dependents who had spoiled her; she really pitied Edwin, and her voice and looks were now as gentle as a few minutes previous they had been rude and overbearing. Edwin, on the other hand, whose generous spirit had revolted from her haughty manner, was subdued by her gentleness, and it was with a broken voice that he replied, “It

is not for myself that I am sorry, young lady, it is for my poor father; it is very terrible for him to live in this poor hut through the storms and cold of the winter; he has been very ill—he is very ill even now.”

“Well, my poor boy,” returned Amabel with a little too much resumption of her patronizing air; “all that is at an end; nurse Bertha has told me all about you, and you shall come and live at the castle, and be my page; and you will have nothing to do but carry my Missal when I go to Mass, or hold my comfit-box, or take care of Guenever, my little pet greyhound, or gather flowers for me, or fill the cup of wine I have when I dine with my lord; and learn to speak French, and sing with me to the lute, and such-like easy labor; and then you will live, oh! so differently, Edwin,—that is your name, is it not? you shall have a beautiful livery of my colors, blue and white; your tunic shall be velvet and silk, and I will work you a girdle myself of crimson and gold to hang your dagger to, and its hilt shall be ivory and gold; and then you will have a nice little chamber in the west tower, near to my apartments, where you can hear my little silver bell, which will tell you when you are wanted; and I will speak to my father that you may have your meals not with the men-at-arms, who only get great pieces of beef and pork, and brown bread and ale; but at the seneschal’s table, which is almost as well served as my lord’s, and where you will have venison, and

capons, and wine, and nice confections. Oh, it is a happy thing for you, Edwin, that nurse Bertha told me how poor you were; you will have fine times at the castle. Don't you think so?"

Amabel had announced the plan of her benevolence with so much volubility, that she afforded Edwin no opportunity to reply; nor did she, in the self-sufficiency of her pride, observe that more than once the color of anger rose to his face, as she enumerated the employments for which she designed him.

Bred in the forest, and free as the wild deer that haunted its coverts, Edwin, who had never received either the humiliating affronts, or scarce less humiliating favors of his social superiors, would have felt some irritation at the young lady's proposal to convert him into what he had heard Siward sneer at as a "fopling page," if even he had not had from his father more than one intimation that he should of right have held as high a place as any knight or gentleman in the land. Still, in spite of her domineering manner, he felt that the little girl really meant to be benevolent and kind, and, in consequence, he chose such gracious and grateful terms in which to decline the office she proposed for him, that Amabel, in her overweening conceit, supposed that it was only his humble consciousness of her great condescension, and of the vast distance between them, that made him hesitate to accept it. When, therefore, Edwin excused himself, under the plea that the

rough life he had led all unfitted him for an attendant in a lady's parlor, she answered, with a satisfied air :

"Oh, don't be afraid, you will soon learn, you are not stupid I am sure, and you will look so nice in my beautiful liveries, I will put up with a good deal, because you are so handsome; my aunt, the Lady Lovel, says that handsome boys should always be ladies' pages; ugly ones do just as well to go and get killed in the wars! However, we have no time to lose, I want you to come with me to the castle at once. Giles here has got a basket with wine and fowls and white bread for your father, and he will stay and attend to him till my lord comes home, and then we shall see what is to be done; for, of course, when you are my page, your father cannot live in this dreadful place. Why, it is just a hut of boughs and osiers; how have you lived in it, Edwin? Why, I declare our swineherds have better. Poor creatures! you shall have another sort of lodging soon. Here, Giles, bring the basket here; and, nurse, you go into the hut and see what you can do for the poor man; and, Ralph, take the boy up on your horse: we have a good hour's ride back to the castle."

As Amabel turned her palfrey's head while issuing these peremptory orders, Edwin would not gainsay them; but when the servants, in obedience to the commands of their young mistress, dismounted and approached the hut, laden with the heavy hamper of

provisions, Edwin, placing himself on the threshold, was about, with grateful thanks, to decline the proffered aid, on the plea of that which he and his father had already received from farmer Norbert, when a heavy hand placed upon his shoulder thrust him roughly aside, and Siward himself, gaunt, pale, and threatening, stood within the doorway of the hut. Some fearful and mysterious passion seemed to agitate the Recluse, for he gasped for utterance, and glared so angrily at Amabel, that the little girl, startled at his looks, reined back her palfrey, while the servants thought him mad.

"Back! back!" at length exclaimed Siward, in a choking accent, and furiously motioning the servants away from the hut; "when I send to ask for the crumbs from the table of Baron Fitz-Clavering it will be time enough for him to bestow his charity. Back! I say, minions, and feed with the cold scraps from your master's table the first famished cur you meet. Have I asked the baron's charity, or has Edwin petitioned to be the menial of his proud and selfish child? But she is but a child, and, in her childish ignorance and vanity, would not understand when I say that, sooner than that Edwin should stoop to be her page, the slave of her silly and wayward humors, I would gladly behold him dead at my feet! Wear silks and tissues as the menial of the Baron Fitz-Clavering—feed daintily at his expense; better live on the wild fruits of the forest, and go clad in a frieze jerkin all his life!"

The servants of Amabel, bewildered between her orders and the angry demeanor of Siward, hesitated what to do; but, as they placed the basket on the ground, the Recluse, in the tempest of his passion, struck it so violently with his foot that the wicker-work gave way, and the broken basket and its goodly contents were scattered about the green slope in front of the hut, and rolled down to the banks of the river. Amabel was fairly frightened by a display of unreasonable anger so far exceeding her own fits of temper; and, as for the poor nurse, she scrambled again on the back of her horse with more agility than grace; for nurse Bertha had grown corpulent, and corpulent people seldom move nimbly. The demeanor of Siward almost frightened her out of her wits.

"Our Lady be gracious to us!" she muttered, feeling for her beads. "Surely the man is demented! Blessed saints, should this be the thanks for my young lady's kindness? Offering to take his frieze-coated boy for her page, indeed!—my troth, when there is ne'er a gentleman in the county but would jump at such a chance for his eldest son. Come home, Amabel, my dear child, come back to the castle; and never a word to my lord, darling, of this ill-fared loon—never a word, darling, as you love your old nurse. for surely she will get all the blame of the affronts those churls have put on thee, though, indeed, Amabel ladybird, I did tell thee it was a vain fancy to have this lad

for thy page—that none but a gentleman born was fit for that.”

“You never told me anything of the sort, nurse,” answered Amabel, shedding tears of anger and mortification; “you told me that Edwin was a handsome boy, and would make a beautiful page; and so he would; and you will come to the castle yet, Edwin, will you not?” she added, turning to the boy, who, shocked at his father’s savage rejection of the young lady’s bounty, had approached her palfrey’s rein to tender some kind of excuse. “Do come to the castle, Edwin,” reiterated Amabel. “Why should you stay with this cross father? nobody will stay with him, why should you?”

“Alas! sweet young lady,” answered Edwin sorrowfully, “if no one will stay with my poor father, the more reason that I should not leave him.”

“Then you don’t choose to be my page? You will not come to the castle?” asked Amabel angrily.

Edwin pointed to the threshold of the hut where his father, exhausted by his late violence, had sunk down, and, with eyes closed, was leaning against the door-post panting heavily for breath.

“Look, sweet lady,” said Edwin; “if I leave him he will die;—how can I leave him?”

“Stand out of my way, then, or I will ride over you!” exclaimed Amabel. “You are an ungrateful wretch! My page, indeed! Why you are too base to be my slave! To dare to say you would not

come to the castle when I asked you,—I, the Lady Amabel! But you shall come there yet, misproud beggar that you are, you and the churl your father; and my father, the Baron Fitz-Clavering, shall hang you both over the great portal, because you have dared wag your tongues so saucily to me. Out of my way, then, or my grooms shall scourge you like a hound!"

Scarce conscious what she did in her passion and disappointment, Amabel raised the little riding-whip which she held in her hand, and as Edwin, mute and confounded by the bitterness of her speech, still kept his hold of the bridle of her palfrey, she jerked it suddenly from his grasp, at the same time striking him so smart a blow across the face with her whip, that the flesh rose in a bruised and discolored wheal. To seize her by the wrist, and snatch away the whip, was with Edwin an impulse which he could not resist; and the passionate girl cowered for a moment beneath the fierce anger of his look, as with a firm hand he again grasped the bridle of the palfrey.

"You need not fear me, young lady," said Edwin, laughing bitterly as he perceived her shrink; "I am not going to hurt you,—there is your riding-whip; but were you the Baron Fitz-Clavering's son instead of his daughter, and had twenty of his serving-men at your back, I would pay you back this blow with interest, though it were at the penalty of being hanged at your castle gate."

As Edwin ceased speaking, he gave back the whip, and relinquished his hold of the palfrey. Amabel, on her part, mortified by the calmness of his rebuke, called angrily to the servants to follow her, and lashed her palfrey so sharply with the whip, that it bounded with dangerous speed towards the precipitous banks of the river, followed at a more moderate rate by the servants. Edwin, on his part, proceeded to the hut, on the threshold of which his father, exhausted by his late violence, was now lying insensible. As this kind of fit was not an unfrequent result of Siward's fits of passion, Edwin fetched water from the hut to sprinkle on his face. Revived by his son's affectionate care, the unhappy man had just unclosed his eyes, when loud shrieks and cries were heard in the direction which had been taken by the party from the castle, and, looking up, Edwin perceived the attendants of the Lady Amabel gathered in a group on the brow of a precipice that overhung the river. Apprehensive that some accident had occurred, Edwin ran to the spot, and arrived just in time to see the palfrey of the Lady Amabel swimming down the stream, and the young lady immersed in the water, as the loose earth gave way from the roots of the bindweed, to the long tendrils of which she had clung when precipitated from her palfrey as it plunged into the river. Meanwhile her retinue stood helplessly on the bank, the old nurse and the other females wailing and wringing their hands, and the grooms and

pages calling out to each other to save the baron's daughter, but not one of the four making any attempt for the purpose.

As for Edwin, he asked no question; but as the golden-haired head of Amabel, from which the gay plumed cap had fallen, disappeared beneath the waters, he ran along the bank, calculating the distance to which the current would hurry her ere she rose again, and then sprang into it. The force of the leap which Edwin had taken carried him down almost to the bed of the river; but he could dive as well as swim, and he rose to the surface just as Amabel was being swept past him. He caught hold of her garments,—she was not yet insensible, but her face had already the paleness of death; and though Edwin was not then quite fourteen years of age, to the latest hour of a long life, he never forgot the look of agony which glared at that moment in the distended blue eyes of Amabel, as she turned towards him her ghastly countenance. Happily both for Edwin and herself, Amabel lost her consciousness ere her arms closed around him in that grasp with which the drowning so often have destroyed the strong swimmer who would have saved them; but the rich attire, of which Amabel was so vain, well nigh cost the lives of both Edwin and herself; for her long floating robes of embroidered velvet, saturated with water, so increased her weight, that, strong and active as Edwin was, he could scarce support her with one arm while he

swam with the other. He felt himself sinking; but the bank was near.

“Oh, blessed Mary, pray for us!” he gasped; then summoning all his failing strength, he dashed aside the waters, and felt the shelving and gravelly bed of the river beneath his feet: at the same time he became conscious that some new comers were among the persons who were watching his exertions from the banks of the river; and as he dragged his enfeebled limbs forward, he perceived a cavalier of distinguished appearance, and a party of men-at-arms. Two of these men descended the bank, received from Edwin the form of the insensible Amabel, and so much exhausted was the poor boy with his exertions, that he was fain himself to accept the aid of these men in climbing the bank. Then, finding that the cavalier was no other than the Baron Fitz-Clavering himself, and that Amabel was already reviving under the care of her nurse, Edwin hastily took his route to the cottage, while the baron and his attendants were still too much occupied with the little girl to heed his departure.



CHAPTER III.

A WEEK had elapsed since Amabel's charitable scheme had met with so unfortunate a conclusion, and Edwin, one balmy summer morning, installed in his office of shepherd, was seated beneath a spreading beech tree, with his dog at his feet, and the flock daintily cropping the juicy herbage.

The sylvan scene around him was very pleasant: the large meadow was bounded on one side by a brook overhung by the noble beech, on the gnarled roots of which he sat; to the right stretched the undulating meadow-land, with the ivy-hung walls of the monastery of St. Aldhelm in the distance; and on the borders of the broad road, which led far away into the forest, was the comfortable homestead of farmer Norbert. Poor Edwin was already beginning to learn the first great and hard lesson of human life, that some sort of disappointment attends even the best accomplishment of our hopes; for Edwin was by no means so happy in the employment of farmer Norbert as he had expected to be. This sense of disappointment did not, however, arise either from the labor being more severe, or Norbert less kind than Edwin had expected. But Siward's illness was increasing, and, with his customary moroseness, he refused to remove from his

hut in the forest to the cottage which Norbert had offered him on the farm; and as Edwin could not bear to abandon him, the boy was compelled, after folding the sheep in the evening, to hurry to the hut instead of the cheerful supper-table of Norbert. Through the long, and, it must be confessed, somewhat tedious days, during which Edwin had only the occupation of watching the sheep, his thoughts would often recur to the expressions which Siward had used with reference to his former position, and he would meditate with an anxious curiosity as to what might have been his own rank; and though, as before observed, not a taint of the base passion of envy corrupted his fine disposition, yet he did think how, if he had at command such wealth and grandeur as surrounded Lady Amabel, he would ride forth with his hounds and hawks,—how he would become a proficient in all knightly exercises, and carry off the prize in many a gallant tournament, or, it might be, in fields of real battle acquire, when he should be eighteen, as great a fame as a military leader as that which made Edward IV. so renowned when he was only the young Earl of March. Some aspirations, too, had Edwin as to acquirements more refined than those; for the revival of literature was at its dawn, and Edward IV. and his brother-in-law, the accomplished Lord Rivers, were no less renowned for their skill in the gentle arts of poesy and music, and the ease with which they would decipher the characters traced on the richly em-

plazoned vellum, or write, or speak in foreign tongues, than for their more warlike acquirements. A soft and sunny day, green fields, and waving trees, with a seat beside a purling brook, and no other occupation than that of watching the sheep, who, shrinking from the intense heat, either dozed beneath the branches of the beech, and oak, or cropped the moist herbage on the margin of the water, might have provoked a day-dream in an older and wiser person than poor Edwin; and so lost was he in a pleasing reverie as to what a great man he might yet perhaps become, that he was twice called by his name ere he looked up; and then he started to his feet in confusion, on beholding Father Gregory, the sub-prior of the monastery, standing beside him, together with a noble-looking person, in whom he recognized the Baron Fitz-Clavering. More than once Edwin had been noticed by a kind word from Father Gregory, when he visited the monastery to try and dispose there of some of the baskets which he wove. To this notice of the sub-prior, he had been recommended by a compassionate lay brother, who had heard from Dame Norbert the pitiful story of Edwin and his father. In the prior's hands, too, he had seen one of the beautiful illuminated manuscripts, in which the lore of the poet and romancist, no less than the homilies of religion, were made familiar to the reader, before the invention of the art of printing. The gentleness and intelligence of the boy had made so great an impression on Fa-

ther Gregory, that it was by his express command that the almoner had visited the hut of the Recluse; but the rudeness of his reception there is known. Not wearied, however, by this repulse, and anxious to release the boy from the dreary bondage in which he was held by his father, the sub-prior was cognizant of Norbert's proposal, and trusted to future time and opportunity to remove Edwin into some occupation more eligible for a youth whom he judged to possess an excellent disposition and more than ordinary abilities.

"I fear, Edwin, that our good Norbert has a careless shepherd," said the sub-prior, with a grave smile, as the boy started to his feet; "I have spoken to thee twice without being heard."

"No, indeed, reverend father, I am not careless," said Edwin, eagerly; "but, in truth, I have many sad thoughts, and sometimes I forget myself in them for a brief space."

"Truly, as may be expected from one of thy sober and mature years," said the Baron Fitz-Clavering with a smile; "but tell me, my good lad," he added in a more serious manner, "wherefore you withdrew yourself so abruptly last week, when you sprang into the river and saved my daughter's life at the peril of your own, while her grooms and pages stood idle on the bank to see her drown? Trust me, I can give thee better chances in the race of life than either you or your father may deem; and surely I shall think no reward too great for him who, with

the grace of Heaven and Our Lady, saved the life of my dear child. You know, do you not, that I am the Baron Fitz-Clavering?"

"I do, my lord, answered Edwin, respectfully; "but, so please you, noble baron, I did not expect a reward. I am happy to have saved the young lady."

"Doubtless you did not, my son," said the sub-prior; "but nevertheless, when it pleaseth Providence to bestow a temporal reward on a generous or just action, it is not only lawful, but a duty, to accept that reward; and thou art doubly fortunate, Edwin, in having rendered this service to the Lord Fitz-Clavering, because he is an upright man, a worthy son of the Church, and in advancing thy worldly interests, will not suffer thee to forget the eternal ones."

"That, indeed, I will not," said the baron; "and I will remember both the more dearly, that this brave boy himself modestly withdrew from the expression of my thanks."

"Noble lord!" replied Edwin, coloring,—for the recollection of the bitter hatred which Siward had always expressed towards the baron embarrassed him;—"noble lord, I am happy to have saved your noble daughter, and I am happy too in my service with the worthy farmer Norbert."

The baron smiled. "But the Lady Amabel offered thee service as her page, did she not?" he inquired; "and will not her service," he added, "be lighter and more pleasing than thy present one? The page

goes more gaily pranked than the shepherd boy, I promise thee; sleeps softer, and feeds more daintily. Wilt thou not exchange thy frieze jerkin for a silken one, and the homestead of farmer Norbert for Castle Clavering?"

"So please you, my lord," answered Edwin, "I **am** all unfit, as, indeed, I ventured to tell the noble damsel, for the duties of a page."

"Would not the office like thee better, now, if thou wert my page instead of my daughter's?" said the baron,—“my page, with a chance, in the time to come, of being my esquire, and it may be, in the end, dubbed a knight on the field of some well-fought battle? How sayest thou, Edwin; thou art a brave boy. Will it not like thee better to fly my falcons than to hold the leash of my lady's lap dog; and to learn how to use the bow and brand, than to sort the silken and golden threads for her embroidery-frame?"

Poor Edwin's trouble and confusion increased; he cast down his eyes, now filled with tears, then he said, in a trembling voice,—“Many, many thanks, noble lord; but, indeed, I am no less unworthy of this service than of that which was graciously proposed to me by the Lady Amabel.”

“Why, my good son, think you before you give the baron such an answer,” said the sub-prior; “I promise thee that thou must not expect again to have such grace extended thee.”

“I know it, reverend father,” replied Edwin, “and plead myself all unworthy of the favor now.”

"Nay! I will give Edwin full time to think," cried the baron. "In sooth, do I not know that my little daughter can offer a grace in so ungracious a manner, that it assumes rather the aspect of an affront? Do not fear to say, Edwin, if that was why you refused it; and tell me truly, if thou wouldst not, as a brave boy should do, prefer to carry the lance and shield of a knight into the battle-field, to twangling a lute in a lady's bower?"

"Indeed, my lord, I should," replied Edwin, with enthusiasm; for the picture which the baron had drawn of the honors and rewards he might, perhaps, attain in his service, was full of allurements for his boyish fancy."

"Then you shall come to the castle at once," said the baron. "My good friend the sub-prior will provide Norbert with another shepherd; and right glad I shall be, Edwin, for my little wayward girl to have daily before her eyes the example of poor modest worth."

"Alas! my lord," replied Edwin, "it would indeed be a happy day for me to obtain service with such a noble baron, and I feel it very sad that I must refuse it, and perhaps also be thought ungrateful; but my father—wherefore I know not—has forbidden me to enter Castle Clavering."

"And will you not venture to disobey your father, even when your doing so shall be for his own good?" inquired the baron; "for I promise thee, Edwin—and thine own sense must assure thee of the fact—

that the fees of thy service would at once suffice to rescue thy father from the penury in which I am told he lives. Come, I have heard that he is as wayward almost as my little spoiled daughter. By our Lady's grace, I know not why thy father hath this prejudice against me; for I have seen him, and can swear that, to my knowledge, I have never had with him the intercourse of either friend or foe, as truly as that I am unable to tax my conscience with any deed that could create for me a secret enemy."

"Alas! noble lord," returned Edwin, "my poor father is at enmity with all mankind; he refuses all friendship, he will admit no consolation."

"And this I think that good Father Gregory will admit, with me, is a very madness," said the baron, "and that as the leech treats an insane patient he should be treated. What think you then, Edwin, of deceiving your father with some honest fraud; of taking service with me, and leaving him to suppose that you are still only the shepherd-boy of farmer Norbert, or, it may be, are studying to become a learned clerk, under the tuition of the good fathers of St. Aldhelm?"

The baron paused for a reply, and Edwin looked hesitatingly at the sub-prior. "Nay, my young son," said the latter, "thou sbalt, in this instance, judge for thyself; I will not direct either thy discretion or thy conscience."

"Oh, my lord!" then exclaimed Edwin, turning

with emotion towards the baron, "can I find words that will tell you my gratitude for your kindness, my sorrow at refusing it? But, good and generous lord, bethink thee how hard a task it would be to deceive my father, how base a thanklessness towards your lordship to conceal the magnitude of your bounty. I cannot openly leave my father, for he will not allow himself a friend, and, reft of my poor help, he would die;—I cannot secretly become a dweller at Clavering Castle; for I should be unworthy of service there, if I could conceal it."

"Thy answer pleases me well, Edwin," said the baron, "and I love thee better for the fashion in which thou dost refuse my service; I blame me that I offered it on terms which could lower thine honest self-esteem. But the prayers of the saints and the blessing of God must be with so good a son, and I believe that some unexpected providence will yet enable thee to enter my service with a free conscience; or it may be, will raise up for thee a worthier friend than myself!"

"That, my lord, could never be!" returned Edwin. "I ask for no greater boon than to become a follower of the good and noble Baron Fitz-Clavering!"

"And therein, Edwin, thou speakest well and wisely!" said the sub-prior, "and I hope the day will yet arrive when I shall see thee riding a valiant esquire in his train!"

"It may be, too!" interposed the baron, "that, without offence to Edwin's right praiseworthy care

to avoid doing violence to what we must even call an unaccountable prejudice of his father, I may, with your help, worthy father, find some means by which he may retain a pleasant memory of the great service he has rendered to me, in preserving the life of my little Amabel !”



CHAPTER IV.

Two years had rolled away, and Edwin was still a shepherd boy in the service of the tenant of the Church, farmer Norbert. The constitution of Siward had seemed to rally after his severe illness; we will not say how much of his recovered strength might be attributed to the abundant, and at times delicate, food, with medicaments, and occasionally a flask of rare wine, which Edwin brought weekly from the house of his master, and which he really received from dame Norbert; though we are not bound to say whether the worthy matron always provided them herself, or whether the dainty viands and old wine were not sent from the buttery or cellars of either St. Aldhelm's monastery, or Clavering Castle. With his accustomed churlishness, too, Siward had refused to abandon his hut in the forest; but the same care which furnished food for his table and medicine for his sickness, had rendered the rude hut a tolerable, if not a comfortable, habitation. Skilful workmen, of course in the employ of Norbert, had visited the cottage, stout planks had been nailed athwart the apertures in the twisted boughs through which the winds of winter had whistled so shrilly, and an excellent bed, and various articles for culinary and general use, had

been added to the interior. It might be that Siward did not care to inquire too curiously as to the source from which these improvements of his condition were derived, the sense of personal advantage so far overruling the dictates of a misanthropic pride. If, however, Siward could have persuaded himself that the physical comforts of an improved shelter and better clothing and food were derived really from the worthy farmer Norbert, he could not have imputed to the same source the improved mind and manners of his son. He knew indeed that Edwin won the prize from all competitors in the village sports, was the most successful of the competitors at the quintain, the strongest swimmer, the most expert wrestler, the most agile runner, the most graceful dancer. Siward was himself a man more learned than was common in those days, except among the churchmen, who were the depositories and revivers of letters: but in the miserable solitude in which he lived, he had neither the means of increasing his own information, or of imparting to his son that which he already possessed; there were no quaintly-illuminated manuscripts for reading,—no materials for writing to be found there; yet in conversing with his son, Siward found that he was fast becoming so much better learned than himself, that, with a touch of his old churlishness, he said one day, with a sneer, “In sooth, Edwin, thou must be high in favor with the Fathers of St. Aldhelm; thou art becoming a

learned clerk: hadst thou not better manage to abide with them altogether? for, of a surety, the lore they impart as ill becomes thy dwelling in this poor hut as thy calling of a shepherd lad!"

"Nay, father!" returned Edwin, "I have never visited Castle Clavering, because it was your will that I should *not*; do not ask of me to refuse also the bounty and instructions of the good monks, for I cannot think that I should be therein bound to obey you!"

"Nay, Edwin!" responded Siward, "I do not tell thee that thou art not to visit at St. Aldhelm's!"

Siward assumed, in speaking these few words, a kinder tone; perhaps he thought that he had stretched too far the limits of his caprice, and certainly if he had expressly forbidden Edwin to visit the monastery, the latter would, for the first time in his life, have disobeyed the command; for virtue and reason impose a limit even upon parental control. There are some unworthy parents, no less than bad children, and Edwin would have been justified in refusing to comply with a command which forbade him the pious instructions of the learned and benevolent monks. Oftentimes, indeed, did he need all the consolation they could bestow, to enable him to bear, with even a semblance of patience, the fractious and tyrannous temper of his father. But the time was fast approaching which was both to relieve Edwin of that heavy cross, and bestow on him for his support, amid future trials, the sweet remembrance

that he had never failed in his duty. Siward was again suddenly taken ill, and upon this occasion he did not refuse either the medicines or advice of the monks; all their skill, however, was in vain, and on the third day, Father Gregory drew Edwin aside, and bade him prepare to lose his father, who it seemed unlikely would live throughout the night. The sub-prior then withdrew, with a promise that he would send one of the lay-brothers to sit up with Edwin, who was excused from his duties on the farm of Norbert during his father's illness.

To say that Edwin felt towards the harsh and gloomy Siward as a son feels for an affectionate and indulgent parent, would not be true, nor would it have been natural. But the mere name of a father is a tie upon a heart so good and affectionate as Edwin's; all his earliest recollections, too, were connected with Siward, and Siward only, for he knew not that he had another relation in the world; and, in spite of the kindness of the monks, and his friends among the villagers, by whom he was generally beloved, and the proffered bounty of the Baron Fitz-Clavering, the sense of his coming loneliness pressed heavily upon Edwin's heart, and as he sat beside the pallet on which Siward lay, and marked his uneasy slumber, and the expression of pain written on his wasted and haggard features, he shed many bitter tears.

It was about the same season that, two years before, the Lady Amabel had visited the hut of the

Recluse, to make Edwin the offer of becoming her page. A fair, sunshiny day in June, with the soft turf sprinkled with flowers, and the birds carolling in the woodland, and the large yellow rays of light darting betwixt the fragrant twine of the honeysuckle that overhung the casement of the hut. But as the sun sunk slowly to his rest, the gay beams seemed to Edwin's fancy to grow wan and sickly, as they streamed upon the face of the dying man. That sun would beam forth bright on the morrow, and the flowers would open, and the birds carol again to his rising, but the worn features upon which he gazed would be calm and still, and the eyes closed for ever to the sunbeams.

As pious as he was affectionate, Edwin, well instructed by the monks of St. Aldhelm in all the solemn mysteries of a Christian's faith, entertained no weak and puerile fears of the approach of death; but as he sat alone in the poor hut, with no sound to break the silence save the vesper song of the birds without, and the heavy painful breathing of the sleeper within, a sense of awe, not unmingled with apprehension, stole over him, and, kneeling beside the pallet, he told his beads for the parting soul. The crimson rays of the sun had melted into faint purple, and the shadows of the coming night mingled with those of that longer night which already shed its gloom on the countenance of Siward, when suddenly he started from his slumbers, and in a quick, but husky and broken, voice, he exclaimed.

“Edwin, my child, my dear boy! dear as though thou wert indeed my own! Listen—come near, bend down your head low, that you may hear me! I have much to tell you, and my time is short; oh, short indeed. O Blessed Mary, pray for me! Pray that I may have time to atone, by confessing all!” As the unhappy Siward gasped rather than spoke these words, his features grew convulsed, while cold dewdrops of agony streamed down them, and his eyes were fixed with a piteous expression on the countenance of Edwin, who tenderly supporting his father in his arms, wept over him. As the violence of his pain passed away, the head of Siward fell helplessly on the boy’s shoulder, and his eyes closed; and then, young, and strong, and healthy as he was, poor Edwin shrunk and trembled beneath his burden, for he feared that his father was already dead. Indescribable, therefore, was the relief he felt, when Siward, again looking up, besought him, in a calmer but fainter tone, to place him in a reclining posture; and when Edwin had done so, he bade him remove a plank from the wall of the hut at his bed’s head, and which had been so contrived as to conceal an orifice, from which, by his father’s directions, Edwin now drew forth a curious box of cedar-wood inlaid with silver. Siward then feebly raised his hand to his own neck, from which Edwin took a small key of the same metal, suspended to a light chain. Siward endeavored to speak further, but his voice was faint and broken, and it was only after swallowing a small

portion of a cordial prescribed by the sub-prior, that he was able to speak in disjointed sentences, and in so low a tone that it was with difficulty that Edwin could catch their meaning.

“Edwin, dear and noble boy, forgive me, and pray for me that I may be forgiven!”

“Forgive thee! alas, my dear father, what have I to forgive?” exclaimed Edwin, in a voice choked by his tears.

“Ah, not alone my harsh temper, which has made thy childhood so unhappy!” moaned the dying Siward, “but a deeper, greater wrong, wrought by my unholy spirit of revenge and pride. But now, in these awful moments, when the world, and its sorrows, and its joys, melt from before me, when nought remains but the remembrance of sin and the fear of its punishment—now do I feel how bitter has been the wrong I have wrought thee. The ways of Providence, are they not inscrutable? yet I, poor worm that I am, have dared to measure those ways in the presumption of my miserable pride. Great wrong was wrought thee in thy infancy by other hands than mine, and in my hatred of those who wrought it, I deemed that their triumphs would last the term of their lives. But oh! this death-bed makes known the blindness of that rage and disappointment, in which I would have forbidden thee, Edwin, other knowledge than befits the poor churls among whom it hath pleased Heaven for a time to cast thy lot. Oh, blessed for ever be the good monks of St. Ald-

helm, who in their benevolence have already foiled this design of my malignant and foolish pride. Edwin, my child, give me your hand—I cannot see you, but as my earthly vision grows dark, so the eyes of the soul are opened, and a glimpse of the future is vouchsafed to me. The cruel Yorkists—for them too shall the sins of the fathers be visited on the children. Edwin, this casket, put it back into its place; make not its existence known, even to the good monks, for two years, not till you are eighteen; then open it, and read the parchments it contains—the time will then be ripe for you to decide what your course ought to be; and meanwhile, I no longer forbid you the bounty of the Baron Fitz-Clavering—he is a good and wise man, though a Yorkist, a partizan of the cruel Edward; and I, alas! the follower of the sainted King Henry, have been both weak and wicked, but little imitating the virtues of my master. The excellent monks, too, Edwin, continue to deserve their instructions and their love! And pray for me, Edwin, pray for me. I have loved thee, too, despite my bitterness—loved thee as though thou hadst been indeed my son. I am not thy father, Edwin!—Bend lower, listen, I am!” Trembling alike with surprise and fear, Edwin yielded to the grasp of Siward’s cold and clammy hand, and bent down his head to catch the last words from those pale and quivering lips, when, with that changeful delirium which so often characterizes the dying hour, Siward relinquished his hold

of the boy's hand, and sitting upright on the pallet, tossed his arms wildly, and exclaimed, in a strong, clear voice, "Hasten, my lord and brother—hasten the field is lost, the banners of Gloucester and Edward are in the midst of our encampment! Hasten to save the prince! the queen! This way, brave archers—this way, gallant knights! We shall win the day yet; King Henry and the red rose for ever!" It was in the paroxysm of the last terrible struggle between life and death that Siward uttered these words, then he fell back motionless; and, as the pale moonbeam stole into the hut and glimmered on the glazed and staring eyes and marble features, Edwin perceived that he was dead. A few minutes the poor boy gave way to a passion of tears, then, as he raised his head, the moonbeams shining on the silver mounting of the casket reminded him of Siward's last injunctions; and just as he had replaced it within the sliding groove, a lay-brother arrived from the monastery, who, after having, with Edwin's assistance, prepared the corpse for interment, dispatched him to St. Aldhelm's with the mournful news of his father's decease, and himself assumed the dismal duty of watching beside the dead.



CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER two years have rolled away ; it is now four years since the Lady Amabel visited the hut of the Recluse in Byland Forest. Great changes, both in public and private affairs, have occurred since then. In the matter of the great fortunes of the nation, which influence the little fortunes of private individuals much more than unreflecting and ignorant persons imagine, the brief space of four years has not often wrought greater changes than happened in England during those four particular years.

Almost immediately after the first meeting of Amabel and Edwin it was that King Edward the Fourth died : died in the flower of life, died at only forty years of age, a lamentable instance of the vanity of human greatness, and the foolishness of vice ; for it was his dissolute conduct, his sloth, and his love of wine and luxurious viands, that destroyed Edward's constitution, and caused the illness that brought him to a premature grave. If he had been a virtuous and abstemious man, he would probably have lived to an old age ; his treacherous and ambitious brother, the Duke of Gloucester, would not have been able to take the crown from him as he took it from Edward's poor little son ; and

the two unfortunate children, Edward the Fifth and his little brother the Duke of York, might have lived to man's estate, instead of being, as historians generally think, cruelly murdered by the orders of their uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. Perhaps this terrible fate of King Edward's little children, too, was a judgment for the base murder of the young Lancastrian Prince of Wales, after the battle of Tewksbury, in which Edward bore a part. We shall see yet how God's judgment came also on the head of Richard the Third. The country, after the death of Edward the Fourth, was in an uneasy state, and the hopes of the Lancastrian party began to revive. The flagrant usurpation of Richard, and the strong suspicions that he had caused his innocent nephews to be murdered, created a great aversion to his government; but his great ability, and the severity with which he treated his opponents, for a time restored quiet to the country, at least in outward appearance. This quiet prevailed about the time of Siward's death. As to the Baron Fitz-Clavering, though a devoted Yorkist, he had maintained his seclusion in the country, for he sorely suspected Richard the Third to be guilty of his nephews' blood; but to have risen in arms against the king after that crime had been committed, would not have restored the poor children to life, while it might have cost his own life, and that of many of his vassals, and have left his daughter a portionless and friendless orphan, as all his estates would in

such a case have been sequestered. Baron Fitz Clavering, therefore, throughout the stormy outset of the reign of Richard the Third, remained quietly in the country, but with a sad heart, for, as Duke of Gloucester, Richard had been his personal friend, and had he been possessed of the crown by a just title, he had the abilities to have made an excellent king.

Thus time rolled on, and at the time of Siward's death, the public mind was in a tolerably quiet state. Far different, however, was its condition at the period when our story re-opens, two years later. The only child of King Richard the Third, Edward Prince of Wales, had been lamentably killed by an accident at Middleham Castle in Yorkshire, and as the throne was now without a direct successor, the wishes of the Yorkists, or partizans of the White Rose, balanced between Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of the late King Edward the Fourth, and her cousin, the young Earl of Warwick, the son of that unfortunate Duke of Clarence who was, by the orders of his brother, Edward the Fourth, drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine in the Tower of London.

A great old dramatic poet of England, John Webster, tells us truly that

"Integrity of life is Fame's best friend,
Which nobly beyond death will crown the end."

How true is this of these wicked and unhappy great people. God's judgment never fails to find

them out, and even in this world to punish their crimes as an example.

Henry the Fourth, the first prince of the house of Lancaster, when he invaded the dominions of his cousin, Richard the Second, took the Blessed Sacrament upon a lie, when he swore that he came only to claim his own private inheritance; but then deposed his cousin, and starved him to death in Pontefract Castle—a horrible crime, which was visited upon his grandson and great grandson, Henry the Sixth, and the poor Prince of Wales, murdered at Tewksbury. Edward the Fourth, too, when he came to deprive Henry the Sixth of the crown, landed at Ravenspur, in Yorkshire, the very port at which Henry the Fourth had landed so long before; he, too, perpetrated the blasphemy of swearing on the Sacrament, that he came but to claim his own dukedom of York. The unfortunate Duke of Clarence, too, put to death by the command of Edward the Fourth, his own brother, was himself most treacherous and cruel, and was deeply concerned in the murder of the Lancastrian Prince of Wales. We shall see, in the end, what other judgment of God, besides the unhappy death of his only child, overtook Richard the Third.

As to the characters of our story, though their fortunes took the bias from the great political events of the time, they were a happy two years that succeeded the death of Siward

The misanthropic recluse was buried in the Abbey

Church of St. Aldhelm ; and as the hut in the forest was not only abandoned to decay, but, in consequence of the strange temper of its occupant, was regarded, by the peasants of the district, with a kind of superstitious horror, Edwin left the cedar-wood casket in the recess of the wall, as a secure place of concealment. Immediately after the death of Siward, Edwin resigned his occupation of a shepherd, and took up his abode at Castle Clavering, by the invitation of the good baron. There he was instructed in all the military accomplishments of the time, and, at the expiration of two years, there was not a handsomer or more accomplished youth to be found throughout the wide county of York.

As for the Lady Amabel, she was as beautiful, and almost as wayward, as a girl of fifteen, as she had been as a child of eleven ; and it required, among her dependents, an ever-present knowledge of her really good and noble heart to enable them to bear patiently with her perverse temper.

Though really grateful to Edwin for the risk at which he had formerly preserved her life, and admiring all the noble energy of his character, the young Lady Amabel still could not resist making him, as well as others, the occasional victim of her caprice ; nay, she sometimes forgot herself so far, that she imposed upon his generosity, by exacting from him services and attentions which no other person would have been willing to render. Thus, upon one occasion, she would demand, that at the

risk of his life, he should climb a steep cliff, to procure for her a knot of wild-flowers; at another she would send him through snows and rain to make an offering for her at the altar of some distant church; or it might be to fetch some bauble or feminine trifle from York. At another time, she would send for Edwin to her bower chamber, when she had some damsels in her company, and keep him in wearying attendance, singing while she played upon the lute, or himself playing on the rebeck while she and her companions danced; and, after all, tell the poor youth, disdainfully, that he was very stupid, and might go, as his services were no longer required. 'Tis true, that, after such insulting conduct, Amabel would, probably, send her nurse to Edwin with some pretty present, and a petition that he would excuse her ill-humor; or, it might be, herself seek the youth in the castle gardens, and apologize for her behavior with tears; but the next day, as Edwin knew to his cost, she would play the same tricks again, always secure that Edwin would scorn to complain to her father, in whose presence, indeed, she never ventured upon such vagaries. This treatment, which he received from Amabel, was, in truth, the only source of discomfort which Edwin experienced at Clavering Castle; and if Amabel had possessed no good qualities to atone for her bad ones—if she had been merely a proud, unfeeling girl, her behavior would have annoyed him much less, as he would have regarded her with contempt and dislike

but there was so much that was affectionate and good in her disposition, that Edwin loved and pitied her, in spite of the pain she occasioned him. The baron, on his part, notwithstanding the magnanimity of Edwin, was by no means unaware of his daughter's faults, and, perhaps, with all his wisdom, provoked some of her displays of temper towards Edwin, by continually proposing him to her as an example.

Meantime the rumor of war spread even into that remote district, and the character and conduct of the king was discussed by the farmer's fireside, as well as in the halls of the great castles. The death of Richard the Third's son had been followed by that of his wife, Queen Anne of Warwick; and though it is probable this poor queen, whose life had been always an unhappy one, died broken-hearted for the loss of her child, the whisper went forth that the king had poisoned her; and when he shortly afterwards proposed to marry his niece Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Edward the Fourth, there were many who believed that he had destroyed his wife to make way for this unnatural marriage. The Baron Fitz-Clavering did not believe this shocking rumor; and, when it became known that Richard had abandoned the idea of marrying his niece, and that the queen dowager, Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of Edward, was treating with the young Earl of Richmond, in France, for him to wrest the crown from Richard, and become the husband of her daughter, and that the partizans of the Red Rose would rise

In the earl's behalf, the Baron Fitz-Clavering called together his vassals, and suits of armor were taken down and polished, and sheaves of new arrows and bundles of spears were laid up in the armory, and bands of stalwart youths filled the courts of the castle, and were exercised in the warlike duties of vassals following their lord into the field. The Baron Fitz-Clavering had determined to fight for King Richard, for it must be remembered that he was a resolute Yorkist, and that, legally, the Yorkists had the right to the crown. Henry the Fourth, the first Lancastrian prince, having been a flagrant usurper, while Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond, was not even the legal heir to the house of Lancaster, claiming merely through his mother, Margaret Beaufort, the granddaughter of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who had herself no right whatever to the crown, as an especial law had been passed to exclude this family of Beaufort from the succession. Beyond all this, too, there still remained a legitimate and male heir to the family of York, in the person of the young Earl of Warwick, the son of the Duke of Clarence, and nephew of both King Richard and Edward the Fourth. For all these reasons, then, if the Baron Fitz-Clavering had even believed King Richard much more guilty than he did believe him, he would still have fought on his side, as it was for justice towards the royal family, and not the claim of the individual King Richard, that he would have contended

As for poor Edwin, he grew so melancholy, while those warlike preparations progressed, that the baron's chief armorer, a rough and somewhat brutal old soldier, who had fought at Tewksbury, said to him one day, with a sneer, in the presence of half a dozen pages, and a score or two of men at arms:

"By St. George, Edwin, we can tell what a man is, but we cannot tell what he may be. Now here stand I, Thomas Dickson, man and boy, a soldier for forty years, a fellow that knows how to give and take a hard knock, and I would have wagered the best suit of armor ever donned by knight or baron that thou wouldst prove as brave in the battle as thou art hardy in the chase. Gramercy, who would have thought that the fellow who swam like a fish four years ago to save my wilful young lady from drowning, and who not a month back stood between my lord and the wild boar in the forest, and dared the tusks of the dangerous brute, while all others fled for fear—who, I say, would have thought that thou wouldst be the fellow to peak and pine when war, real glorious war, is talked of? Wouldst thou believe it, comrades, I met him this morning, when ye were all astir, trying your skill with the cross-bow, with his arms athwart upon his breast, and his brow knitted, and his eyes cast down, and his cheek as pale as a puling maiden's, strolling along the garden walks; and this, by my troth, hath been his mood ever since the noble game of shivering spears and dinting helmets has been talked of. Skewer

me upon nurse Bertha's bodkin, if this be not the truth; Edwin, the marvel of youths, fears the ringing of swords and the bray of the trumpet! So much for favorites." This speech of the churlish armorer was made while Edwin was taking account of certain arms, which that morning had been sent into the castle, and was received with a loud laugh from those to whom it was addressed; for the favor with which, through his own merits, Edwin was regarded by the baron, had excited much envy among the retainers. If he looked pale when old Dickson met him in the garden, he did not look pale in the armory; but commanding his temper, he quietly answered, "If your advanced years, and your being a favorite with my lord, did not protect you, I would teach you better than to say that I turn pale from a lozel fear of the war!"

"You would teach me! you!" exclaimed the armorer, throwing the corselet he was examining with a crash upon the ground, and approaching Edwin with a threatening air. "Marry come up, my gay gosshawk, I'd advise you try your talons in this quarter!"

The tone and demeanor of Edwin had silenced the jeering laugh of the retainers; and Dickson, wishing to excite them to further insolence, placed his brawny person purposely on the threshold, as Edwin was about to leave the armory.

"I pray you stand aside, Master Dickson!" said Edwin calmly.

‘ When it pleases me, master popinjay !’ returned Dickson, whose temper was not improved by certain draughts of strong ale which he had been quaffing in the buttery. “ Look you, times are coming, when steel coat will no longer be called upon to give place to silken jerkin !” he added, glancing spitefully at Edwin’s attire, which was ordered according to the taste of the Lady Amabel, and the wealth and liberality of her father the baron.

“ Stand out of the way, Master Dickson,” reiterated Edwin, whose anger was rising at these unprovoked insults, and at the renewed titter with which they were received.

“ Well, then, I won’t stand out of the way !” roared Dickson. “ Thou hast made a boast of what thou wouldst teach me, whipster ; now drive me hence an’ thou canst. Thou, to be sure ! the misproud brat of some rascal Lancastrian, I ween. Thy father, to be sure ! and who was he ? some jack trooper, following the flag of proud Somerset, or Black Clifford himself perhaps. An’ I had been the baron, I would have hanged thy father at the castle gate, I would !” Any further boasts of the brutal injustice Master Dickson would have committed, if he could, were here summarily put a stop to by the strong hand of Edwin, which, twisted in the collar of his jerkin, left the way free, by sending him to measure his length in the armory. Edwin was then turning from the chamber ; but the infuriated Dickson sprang to his feet, and rushing after him

with a drawn dagger, would probably have killed him on the spot, but for the interference of some other men-at-arms, who, if they had no love for Edwin, at any rate entertained a wholesome fear of their lord, and were therefore indisposed to permit his favorite attendant to be murdered. Nevertheless, a heavy buckler, being dislodged from a trophy of arms in the scuffle, fell to the ground, grazing Edwin's forehead in its descent; and had the youth been half an inch nearer, the purpose of Dickson might have been effected without the use of his dagger.

It is probable that, when the fury of the moment was passed, Dickson was not sorry that his companions had interfered between him and Edwin, as, after they had been separated, he turned sullenly away, and left the youth to proceed to his own apartment, where he had scarcely washed the stain of the blood from his forehead, when he received a summons to the great hall, where he found the baron issuing his orders to the seneschal, the cellarer, and other principal persons of his household, for the reception of a young knight, Sir Philip Harrington, whom he expected at the castle that day, with dispatches from the king.

On Edwin's appearance, the baron called him forwards, and ordered him, forthwith, to take horse and ride to the monastery of St. Aldhelm, giving him a letter for the prior; then, observing the wound on Edwin's forehead, he inquired its cause, for

which Edwin, unwilling to draw upon Dickson the wrath of his lord, simply stated the fall of the buckler.

"Gramercy, boy! but this accident is an untoward one!" answered the baron; "for, in sooth, we would have thee in thy best looks to night, for the credit of Castle Clavering, since we have heard that this young Sir Philip Harrington is the prime of the court gallants, for his accomplishments, his handsome person, and brave attire. His father was an old friend of mine, and our lord the king, doubtless, bears a memory of that friendship in choosing a knight so young for the bearer of his dispatches; for this Sir Philip is but a year older than thyself, Edwin, and I and old Geoffry, the seneschal, here, have been laying our account with thy upholding the honor of our barony, and showing this perfumed gallant and his train that we are not all clumsy and unnurtured churls down here in the north. A murrain on the chance that gave thee that ugly blow, which discredits that pleasant favor. However, we must e'en make the best of it; the ride through the forest will clear thy looks, and the swelling may abate; and look, Edwin, thou don thy gayest suit and best manners for the evening meal."

Promising respectfully to observe these injunctions, Edwin withdrew; but while the horse was being saddled, to take him to St. Aldhelm's, by the advice of the cellarer he bathed the bruise on his forehead with strong water, which the old man as-

ured him was a sovereign remedy to remove the discoloration; and then his cellarer, who had been all his life attached to the family of the Fitz-Claverings, with an air of huge self-importance, after many nods, winks, and inuendoes, informed Edwin that he, the cellarer, could see as far as most people, and that he remembered the marriage of the Baron Fitz-Claving, and the marriage of Sir Philip Harrington's father; and, in short, that he could put two and two together, and he understood, he knew very well, why the grave, crook-backed King Richard sent on his messages a fopling young knight, who might have graced the court of his brother King Edward the Fourth. Oh, it was certain, it was easily understood, there was a plan, some year or two hence, to marry the Lady Amabel to this Sir Philip Harrington.

This whimsical fancy of the old cellarer at first much diverted Edwin; but as he pondered it over during his solitary ride to St. Aldhelm's, he grew sad, remembering the strange, capricious temper of Amabel, and the little likelihood that this young knight, or any other knight, or noble, whom the baron might choose for her husband, would bear with her whims as they had been borne with at Castle Claving. Then Edwin grew angry at this fancy, that any man, ay, though he were even a belted earl, should dare use a harsh word to this darling Amabel, whom he loved so dearly, with all her faults, and who was so dearly beloved by all the dwellers

at Castle Clavering. From this, Edwin fell to pondering upon his own real estate, and the possibility that he was himself as nobly born, and, of right, as wealthy as Sir Philip Harrington, or any other who, as Amabel grew into womanhood, might become a suitor for her hand. And this led him into sadder and graver thoughts, and the remembrance of the determination he had made that very morning, to make known to the sub-prior the dying injunctions of Siward, and petition him for advice as to whether, as he was now so near the completion of his eighteenth year, it would not be proper for him, ere accompanying the Baron Clavering into the field, to examine the parchments contained in the cedar-wood basket, still concealed in the old hut in the forest.

For many weeks past, indeed, poor Edwin had endured the most painful anxiety on the score of the renewal of the civil war; for in taking arms against the Lancastrians, he knew not with what near relations or ancient friends he might be contending, while to manifest a reluctance to follow the banner of the Baron Fitz-Clavering would subject him to an accusation of mingled cowardice and ingratitude. On arriving at the priory, Edwin was forthwith ushered into presence of the sub-prior; and having delivered the missive of the baron, he made known to the good father the sources of his own embarrassment.

“And it is partly on your account, Edwin, that the baron has sent me this,” replied the sub-prior,

with a grave smile, pointing to the baron's letter "I will tell you, both he and I have surmised that Siward had been among the partizans of the Red Rose; and the baron has marked the depression of your spirits, so unlike your accustomed cheerfulness, and has here commissioned me to question you on the subject, for he loves you too well, Edwin, to seek to bias your conscience, or wish you, for love or gratitude towards him, to take up arms for the White Rose. On my own part, Edwin, I deem you are bound, before deciding for either side, to read the documents of Siward; and it will be as well, perhaps, for me to examine them, too, ere we mention their existence to the baron. I will, therefore, write to him, saying that from knowledge of Siward's history derived from mine holy office, I deem it proper that you should not, for a few days decide what part you will take in this unhappy quarrel, which, alas! it seems is again to drench the plains of England with her native blood. May the prayers of our blessed Lady and the saints avail to preserve our country from again encountering the horrors of a protracted civil war; better a fresh dynasty, better the talked-of union of Harry Tudor with Elizabeth of York—better any evil than this continued bloodshed which sets brothers against brothers, and fathers against sons."

"And which may, perhaps, alas! forbid me to become the pupil in arms of my noblest and best benefactor," answered Edwin, with a sigh.

"Do not fear for that, my son," returned the sub-prior; "it may be that changes will occur during which it will be rather as a partizan of the Red Rose than the white one, that it may be afforded thee to evince thy gratitude to the noble Baron Fitz-Clavering; for, trusting to thy discretion, Edwin which I know exceedeth the limits of thy years, I will tell thee that I apprehend that the popular feeling is against the cause of King Richard; the fraud and violence by which he obtained the crown, the severity of his government, and, above all, his late unholy design of wedding his niece, have offended many of the warmest supporters of the house of York, and disposed them to accede even to an accommodation with the Lancastrians. However," concluded the sub-prior, in a more cheerful tone, "I will detain thee no longer, my dear son, in the discussion of these doleful and dangerous topics, and do thou dismiss them for the present from thy mind, for I learn from the baron's letter that you are to have high festivity at Castle Clavering to-night, in honor of a certain guest bearing missions from the king, one Sir Philip Harrington; and as I know that in the dwelling of the good baron recreation does not exceed the bounds of discretion, I would have thee freely take thy share in it, Edwin, for innocent enjoyment is the privilege of youth."

Thus counselled by the monk, and having promised to procure the casket from the hut of the de-

ceased recluse, and visit St. Aldhelm's with it on the following day, Edwin set out on his return to the castle.



CHAPTER VI.

THE route from the monastery of St. Aldhelm to the castle of the Baron Fitz-Clavering lay chiefly through the beaten paths of the forest, occasionally diverging into the more open road, crossing some gently-swelling hill, or winding through the dales watered by the Ribble.

This little journey, then, beneath the waving trees, or beside the murmuring waters, where the silence was broken only by the song of the birds, the buzz of the summer insects, the clack of a mill, or the occasional bark of the shepherd's dog, furnished the opportunity for a youthful and fertile fancy to indulge in dreams by day, as extravagant as any that could present themselves during the slumbers of the night. We will not say in what kind of fantastic visions Edwin was indulging, as his horse, with the bridle lying loosely on its neck, took its own pace beside the skirts of the forest, when a loud and imperious voice caused him to start, and turn his head somewhat angrily, as those haughty tones put the pleasant visions to sudden flight. He then perceived a well-equipped party of riders, who had apparently just emerged from one of the devious roads that crossed the district into the more open country. Most of these riders wore a kind of half armor, consisting of a back and breast-plate, a steel gorget or

neck-piece, worn over a leathern jerkin, and a steel cap, or head-piece. Their arms consisted of heavy swords, battle-axes, and daggers. The leader of these men seemed to be a young cavalier, apparently not more than a year or two the senior of Edwin; and as he spurred his horse forwards, the latter had ample time to note the richness of his arms and equipments. Like his men, he was arrayed in a breast-plate over his jerkin, but the material of this jerkin was scarlet cloth, stiff with gold embroidery, and his glittering cuirass was beautifully damasked with inlaid work of silver. A scarlet mantle hung from his shoulders, and in lieu of the light helmet which depended at his saddle-bow, he wore a cap of scarlet cloth, with a tall white plume fastened by an agrafe of precious stones. The face and person of this youth did not disparage his apparel; for though his figure was slight, his complexion, perhaps, too fair, and his features too feminine, they must still have been called handsome, in spite of a dash of mingled affectation and insolence in his looks and manner.

Poor Edwin was certainly doomed to mortification on that day, the first on which any retainer of the Baron Fitz-Clavering had failed to treat him with respect; and he had felt little more irritated by the conduct of Dickson, a low and brutal man-at-arms, than he now was by the tone and demeanor of the stranger, as, accompanied by a single attendant, he rode forwards and demanded of him the way to Castle Clavering.

On Edwin indicating the road as that which he was himself pursuing, the stranger replied :

"It is well—if thou art going that road, good youth, and will be our guide, we will give thee a cup of good wine and a rose-noble for thy pains."

Now there does not seem much that was offensive in this proposition, and a rose-noble was ample payment for so slight a service; but looks and tones are sometimes the vehicles of greater rudeness than coarse words, and Edwin as little liked the supercilious glance with which the stranger eyed him up and down, as the proposition to pay him, as if he had been a lacquey, or poor villager; he therefore answered, a little sharply, "I thank you, fair sir; I am neither so fond of liquor as to desire wine, nor so poor as to need payment for so small a service—so please just to follow the road I take."

The stranger seemed perfectly aware of the rudeness of his own conduct, for he laughed disdainfully as he answered, "Nay, good youth, I pray thee take not offence where none was intended. Why, you men of the north are as rugged as your own rocks, and as thorny as the brambles. But, for our Lady's grace, be pleased to conduct us to the castle of this doughty baion, for we have ridden since daybreak, and our adventures have been more various than agreeable, seeing that in one morning we have scrambled over precipices, floundered in a quagmire, splashed through a torrent, and finally lost our way in the wood."

As the tone which the stranger used in thus speaking was somewhat more courteous, Edwin had only to comply with the request, and, closely followed by the cavalier and the man who seemed to be his favorite attendant, while the rest of the retinue kept at a little distance, he pursued the way to the castle at a somewhat mended pace.

As they pursued their journey, the stranger occasionally addressed some insignificant observation to Edwin, but more frequently conversed in French with his attendant, and so long as this conversation touched upon no topic connected either with himself or the inhabitants of Clavering Castle, Edwin did not think it necessary to inform the gentleman that he was acquainted with the language, in which he, probably, thought that he was concealing the purport of his discourse.

Meantime, their amended speed had brought them to within a mile of Clavering Castle, and an abrupt turn in the road threw into full view the whole of the magnificent edifice, the towers of which had been seen at intervals through the interstices of the forest.

Edwin pointed out the castle to the stranger, who, noting the information merely with a slight gesture, turned again to his attendant and said, with a laugh, and again using the French language :

"So, Baldwin, yonder is Castle Clavering. What sayest thou now, old fellow? Hast not a word to congratulate thy master on the prospect of possessing

such a goodly pile? On the word of a knight, this child Amabel must be as unsightly as they say she is well-favored, if, when she have years for the fulfilling of the contract made betwixt her father and mine, after Black Clifford's son was slain at Tewkesbury, I fail to complete a bargain which will make me the lord of so fair a barony."

"None who know thee will doubt that!" answered the attendant, also speaking in French; "for though thou hast no unknighly fear of the ringing of steel broadswords, thou hast a very burgher's dotage for broad gold pieces. But, good lack, dear pupil and master, Sir Philip, every rose has its thorns, and how sayest thou of the bitter temper of my lady baroness that is to be, and the favor in which her father is said to hold the foundling boy, whom he picked up in his charitable folly some years ago? May not the doting old baron give this boy, to his share, more of his gold pieces than may suit thy liking."

"Trust me, Baldwin, on both one point and the other," answered the stranger, with a scornful air. "Go to; I will break the girl's spirit, as we break a restive colt, and make her kiss the hand that corrects her; and as for the boy, ah Baldwin, I can tell thee there are matters of some suspicion connected with that boy of moment enough to have been worth the cognizance of our dear and well-shaped king, who, thou knowest, takes as tender an interest in the affairs of his subjects as did his brother before him; and I need not remind thee, Baldwin, that more than

one eminent Lancastrian has disappeared, who certainly fell not on the field of battle. Marry, I shall have some accounts to settle with that boy."

"Then the accounts will be well paid, Sir Philip," returned the attendant; "thou art not the man to neglect a debt of that sort. But pray you, what is your judgment of this springald, our guide, this cavalier of the broken brow? Though he seems in this instance to have taken a hard knock, he is well able to give one. What if he be the very fellow you seek, the stripling favorite of the old baron?"

"Truly, Baldwin, there is a sort of miracle in the union of our thoughts," replied the knight. "This youth bound to Clavering Castle, with looks and speech as proud as though he were the baron's son, and garb as gay as some pampered retainer—oh, I doubt we have lighted on the game, or the game on us, when least we looked for it!"

"And saying and supposing about this youth, dear master, various strange matters, which I, your humble servant, never dream of; what will you do then, Sir Knight?" said the man.

"That which seemeth to me best fitting," replied Sir Philip. "Should you not have reckoned, Baldwin—go to—when thou taughtest me the art of shutting up secrets as closely as our beloved king himself can do—should you not have reckoned that I would first practice it on thyself?"

The attendant smiled grimly, but made no comment, as the knight thus replied to him, with a look

of mingled craft and malice that deformed his handsome features, and was equally odious in one so young.

Though fully sensible of the impertinence of Sir Philip Harrington's supposition that he did not understand French, a language more familiarly in use among the upper classes during the middle ages than even at present, Edwin, when it commenced, had forborne to make Sir Philip acquainted with his error, from simple disgust at his overbearing and uncourteous manner. As it progressed, however, Edwin was as much startled by the evident allusions to himself, as he was irritated by the freedom with which the knight and his confidant alluded to the Baron Fitz-Clavering and his daughter. We must confess that poor Edwin was not displeased to find this conversation, of which he was an unintentional listener, confirmed the prejudice which he had somewhat unreasonably conceived against Sir Philip, even before he encountered him. He ought, perhaps, so soon as he found that the speech of the knight touched upon subjects of which it could not possibly be supposed that he designed Edwin to be a listener, to have informed Sir Philip that he was acquainted with the French tongue; but for this breach of strict honor, the perilous times in which he lived must plead his excuse, as he knew not but that the very lives of himself and his kind patron, the baron, might be in danger. And this was another lamentable result of those civil broils, that

the most upright and truth-loving persons were compelled, in self-defence, to meannesses and subterfuges, which, under other circumstances, they would have disdained.

Meanwhile, as the party was within a few minutes' ride of the castle, Edwin indicated to Sir Philip the road to the great gateway, and making his adieu pressed his horse into a gallop, and entering the fortress by one of the postern gates, he hastened to deliver to the baron the missive of the sub-prior, and to inform him of the approach of his expected guest.

Edwin then retired to his own chamber to change his dress for the evening banquet, which was always served with great splendor in those old baronial dwellings.

While preparing for this banquet, too, the thoughts of Edwin were anxious and disturbed, and heartily did he wish the evening at an end, that he might, with the break of day, hasten to the forest, and examine the documents contained in the cedar-wood casket left by Siward, to which the conversation of Sir Philip Harrington and his man Baldwin had given a greater interest than ever. Nothing was more probable, too, than that Sir Philip would learn that his confidential talk with Baldwin had been understood, and Edwin felt that, in such a case, the enmity which the knight was predisposed to evince towards him would be aggravated.

CHAPTER VII.

It was not surprising that, with such unusual sources of disquietude, Edwin did not appear in the banquet-hall with the frank and joyous air that so well became his youth and noble character. All the splendor of the Baron Fitz-Clavering was on this evening exhibited in honor of his guest; but to modern notions this state would appear cumbrous. It was customary in those days for the military retainers and servants, who were not on duty, to dine and sup with their lord, and the feast was spread in the great hall of the castle. The distinctions of rank were, however, severely marked. A spacious platform at the upper end of the hall was called the dais, and at the table spread there, the lord and lady of the castle and their guests were seated; even at this table the quality of the guest was noted by his place being appointed either above or below the salt, the latter being, of course, indicative of the inferior degree. Below the dais, on either side of the huge apartment, were the tables at which fed the men-at-arms and superior officers of the baron's household. A magnificent sight, however, was one of these castle halls, when the great feudal lord dined or supped with all the pomp and circumstance of his condition, and very splendid looked the hall

of Clavering Castle on that particular evening; for those nobles were like petty kings, and were served with more ceremony than in these more polished days is awarded, except on occasions of peculiar state, even to sovereign princes. The splendor of our ancestors, too, had reached its extreme during the reigns of the latter Plantagenet princes, and the evils of the poverty occasioned by the civil war, and the rapacity of a new and needy nobility, were not yet felt by the nation. It is in the reigns of the cruel and blood-thirsty Tudors that we shall see how the wars of the Roses led to the plunder of the Church.

Many of the Yorkist nobility, after Edward the Fourth was seated on the throne, obtained from him grants of the sequestered estates of the Lancastrians; the Baron Fitz-Clavering was not one of these, but his wealth was very great, and in his own castle he exhibited a pomp and hospitality only inferior to that which had previously been exercised by the great king-making Earl of Warwick himself.

The great hall was in itself a noble and imposing apartment, paved with stone, and with the carved oaken roof supported by massive pillars. A large window over the doorway was fitted with the richest stained glass, and lesser ones at the sides were intersected with the same costly material. The custom so constantly mentioned of strewing the floor with rushes, prevailed only in the great hall and inferior apartments of those superb castles; and in

every well-ordered household they were removed and fresh ones supplied from day to day. Sometimes, upon state occasions, too, sweet-scented herbs and the inferior sorts of flowers were mingled with these rushes. The hall of Castle Clavering had been laid with fresh rushes on that evening, and as the sewer and cooks, with their attendants, hurried about their respective duties, the moist rushes, mingled with daisies, kingcups, and other wild flowers, sent up a pleasant savor as they yielded to the foot. As for the dais, that was spread with a crimson foot-cloth; a fine damask cloth from Flanders, too, bleached to the whiteness of snow, was spread on the table; the innumerable wax-lights burned in silver sconces; but below the dais the long oaken tables were bare, and brass lamps, suspended from the roof, illumined that portion of the hall. The viands, too, at the inferior tables, consisted chiefly of huge joints of beef, pork, and mutton, and brown bread, with strong ale for drinking; but at the baron's table there was a profusion of more delicate fare, mingled with some dishes, which were then esteemed dainties, but which we should scruple to eat of in these days. Among these was the flesh of the porpoise and the peacock, which last was always brought in by the sewer with great ceremony, with its tail spread, and a sponge filled with lighted spirits in its mouth. This bird was never served but at the tables of the most distinguished persons; and it was a custom among the younger nobles and

gentry, when they had any deed of chivalry in contemplation, to make oath for its performance in the presence of the peacock and the ladies. This was called "The Vow of the Peacock."

Meantime the preparations for the feast at Castle Clavering were concluded; but in his way to the great hall, Edwin encountered the Lady Amabel and her nurse.

Amabel was most gracefully attired in robes of white silk, sparkling with embroidery of silver, and strings of pearl were twisted with her bright golden hair. She stopped Edwin on his way, and had he been less occupied with melancholy and anxious thoughts, he would have noticed the merry mischief that danced in her blue eyes, as she eagerly exclaimed:

"Edwin, have you seen our guest, this young knight, Sir Philip Harrington? Oh, Edwin, my friend, I advise thee to look on him as thou wouldst look on a mirror, and mould thyself, if thou canst, in his fashion. In sooth, I own it may be a task beyond thy skill; but thou wilt attempt it, Edwin, at my desire, wilt thou not?"

Now we have admitted that poor Edwin, not being without his share of human failings, had on the first mention of this young knight conceived a dislike to him, which dislike was indeed justified by Sir Philip's language and demeanor; it was, therefore, too much that this youth, who was evidently a compound of insolence and foppery, and whom he

had good reason to believe was his own personal enemy, should be proposed to him as a model of imitation, and it was in a tone sharper and more determined than was usual with him that Edwin replied :

“The Lady Amabel will pardon me, if to win her grace I cannot make this Sir Philip the mirror of my actions. I have seen the knight, and see nothing to admire either in his person 'or in his speech!”

“Oh!” returned Amabel, with one of her most provoking laughs. “Listen to the churl, dear nurse! By my troth, Edwin, thou art jealous. Oh! the time has been I thought thee well-looking enough, but thou art a mere clown after Sir Philip!”

“I regret,” answered Edwin, “that to please the Lady Amabel I cannot acquire the graces of this knight. It is now four years since I first told the noble damsel that I was unworthy of the courtly offices to which she would promote me, and I feel no better disposed to them now than then; my gifts, such as it hath pleased Providence to make them, are of another sort.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Amabel, laughing more immoderately, “am I not right? Is he not jealous, nurse? But, poor Edwin, in sooth, I ought not to be too hard on thee, seeing that the graces of this knight might provoke the envy of many a gallant youth better nurtured and nearer his own degree than thou art!”

It would have been most proper for Edwin to have passed over these foolish taunts of Amabel with contempt; but he was still a mere boy, and knowing all that he had suffered and done for Amabel, and remembering how this knight, whom she so much admired, had spoken of the fashion in which he would curb her temper, his patience failed him, and he answered bitterly: "It remains to be seen, fair lady, whether the poor Edwin was, after all, so meanly nurtured, or so much below the degree of this knight; or whether, high-placed as is the condition of the Lady Amabel, it may not be as unwisely as unkindly done, for the sake of a popinjay stranger, to scoff at one who has already risked his life for hers, and who would do so again, either for her own or for her good father's sake!"

This allusion to his past services had scarcely passed Edwin's lips, ere he repented having made it; but often as he had witnessed the ebullitions of Amabel's temper, he was not prepared for the fury expressed in her looks and tones, as she cried, turning to old Bertha—

"There, dost thou hear that, Bertha? thou who art always prating in praise of this malapert boy, who has grown so vain on my lord's charity that he mistakes the bounty it bestows for his right. Churl, did I call thee?" she continued, addressing Edwin, and weeping for very passion—"churl, did I call thee? yes, thou art ten times a churl. Base-born thou must be, for hadst thou one drop of knightly or noble

blood in thy veins, it would have risen to forbid thy boast of the service it was thy fortune to render me."

"In sooth, Edwin," interposed the nurse, "thou dost not well to remind my young lady of thy service. What an' thou didst save her from drowning? Was there a gallant youth between York and Lancaster who would not have done as much to rescue this darling child?"

"You are right, nurse," answered Edwin frankly. "I take shame to myself, and humbly pray the Lady Amabel to pardon me the ungentle boast."

"That I never will," exclaimed Amabel; "and I tell you again, Edwin, this Sir Philip Harrington seemeth to me the model of a gentleman and a knight, and I will never grieve any more that my lord and Sir Philip's father betrothed me to the young knight in my cradle. Oh, no; I shall think it very pleasant to be given, with my castles and lands, to whomsoever my father listeth; to be sold, as the burghers sell to me their bales of tissue and velvet. And as for you, Edwin, I will always hate you, and say that you are not near so handsome, or good, or brave, as Sir Philip Harrington."

With these words, the Lady Amabel tore her robe from Edwin's grasp, and leaning on her nurse, went off sobbing, to prove how much she admired Sir Philip Harrington and hated poor Edwin. As for Edwin, he was, on his part, so much disturbed by this scene, that he was fain to retire for a few moments to his chamber ere he presented

nimself in the hall. The consequence of this was, that the banquet had commenced ere he made his appearance, and the baron, who, with all his excellent qualities, was somewhat a stickler for ceremony, reminded him that it was ten minutes since the horn of the sewer had sounded. Presuming not to offer any reply to this implied reproof, Edwin took his customary seat at the lower end of the board, with the chamberlain and pages of the household; but his heart grew sad as he glanced towards Amabel, who, seated beside Sir Philip Harrington, seemed to derive great amusement from the lively conversation of the knight. Occasionally, too, in the pauses of the music of the minstrels, who, as was customary on great occasions, were stationed in a gallery at the end of the hall, Edwin caught a few words of the extravagant compliments that were addressed by Sir Philip to the young lady, who, as she made a laughing rejoinder, more than once glanced towards Edwin, as if desirous that he should note the progress that the stranger was making in her favor. Meantime, the more weighty portions of the repast, such as the meats and fowls, having been removed, were replaced by pastry, fruits, and confections; and the baron, according to his wont, ordered the chief of the minstrels to be summoned from the music gallery, and bidding the attendants fill for him a goblet of wine, desired him then to give Sir Philip a specimen of his skill, for this minstrel was a favorite of the good baron, and a

proficient in his own gentle art, in which he had instructed both the Lady Amabel and Edwin. Upon this occasion, the minstrel tuned his harp to a strain and to words which the baron had never heard before, and as he greatly admired both the one and the other, he demanded of the minstrel whether they were of his own invention.

"No, in sooth, my lord," replied the minstrel, "'twas a younger and fresher hand than mine that supplied both the music and the words."

"Good faith, minstrel," said Sir Philip, leaning back in his seat, and twisting his own perfumed locks with an air of indescribable affectation, "thou art an exceedingly honest fellow not to take unto thyself the merit of the strain, an' its composer be not here to contradict thee. Such poesy and such melodies would have made thy fortune in the court of King Edward, and would not fall amiss in that of King Richard, now that its atmosphere is brightened by the presence of the fair star and paragon of all excellence, the Princess Elizabeth. Tell us, I pray thee, who is the author of the strain, and I will see to his fortunes, and thou shalt have this gold chain as thy reward for thy own sweet singing.

"And I, Bellville, will add this ring to the chain," said the baron, drawing a diamond from his finger. "I knew not we had a troubadour of such rare skill in our district; come, Bellville, tell us his name, or own that thy modesty has led thee to disclaim thine own production."

The minstrel smiled, but the Lady Amabel looked down, and seemed struck with sudden confusion, as he replied, "Good, my lord, I have not so much the virtue of modesty, and would gladly proclaim myself the author of this charming strain but it was framed by another, nor dare I make the minstrel known but by his own consent. By our Lady's grace, I would fain possess the fair guerdons offered by your lordship and this honorable knight, but I dare not barter for them the promise I have given."

A subdued titter was heard among the pages as Bellville, the minstrel, spoke thus; and one, who was a favorite companion of Edwin, stooped down and whispered to him, while the Lady Amabel colored, and the baron said to Bellville, laughing:

"This is a most fantastic minstrel, this friend of thine; for, with all respect for the gentle art, it must be admitted of its professors that they are not, in general, burdened with an undue modesty, but, on the contrary, like no tune so well as that which is sung to their own praises. But, prithee, Bellville, comes it not within the limits of thy secrecy to tell us if this minstrel is known to us, or belongeth to our household? consider this ring and the chain of Sir Philip are worth thy having?"

"And mine own favor, and, of a consequence, that of the first gallants at the court; therefore, I advise thee, for thy friend's sake and thine own, to give up his name," said Sir Philip in a tone at once imperious and affected.

The poor minstrel hesitated, and looked longingly at the chain and ring; then he turned towards Edwin with such an expression of comic entreaty, that the pages, who guessed the mystery, and whose mirth had been repressed by respect for the baron, fairly laughed outright.

"What, is it Edwin, then?" said the baron. "Canst thou inform us of the name of this wonderful minstrel? Do so, if thou canst, for thy friend Bellville's sake, who has taught thee to touch the harp with a skill equal to his own. What is this minstrel's name?"

"Bellville himself will tell thee, noble and dear lord, and thereby win the rich guerdons proposed by yourself and this honorable knight," exclaimed Edwin, rising and advancing to the baron's footstool; and then, bowing profoundly, he added, "and I myself, ere Bellville makes known his name, beg to decline for the minstrel the proffered patronage of Sir Philip Harrington."

"Which thou well mayest do, dear pupil," said Bellville; "and no disparagement to the knight's bounteous offer either, seeing that he who is skilled like thee in the arts of arms, and in the *gay science*, and hath withal so noble a friend as the Baron Fitz-Clavering, needeth no other protector, though he were the king himself!"

"And so thou art the minstrel, Edwin," said the baron, as he handed the ring to Bellville. "In truth,

I knew not thou wert so accomplished a troubadour."

"But I knew it, my lord the baron," said the nurse, who was seated, as usual, on a low chair behind her foster-child the Lady Amabel—"but I knew it, for Edwin has sung that lay, and others as charming, in the bower of my Lady Amabel, and under her window on the summer nights."

"Nay, thou mightest have given us a taste of thy skill, too, Edwin," said the baron; "thou knowest well we love the tinkle of the harp-string after a day's hunting, and we shall demand it of thee in the time to come—it may be after some hard-fought battle."

Sir Philip frowned, as if he were not pleased with the gracious tone of the baron's speech to Edwin; then tendering the gold chain to Bellville, he said:

"There, minstrel, is the guerdon I promised thee;" then he added, spitefully glancing at the rased skin on Edwin's temple, "but, sooth to say, since this youth turns out to be the poet and musician, I am right glad he has of his own will released me of the promise I made of presenting him as a court minstrel; for whatever may be thy opinion, it seemeth to me that he is better skilled in the art of cudgel-playing, than in an honorable dexterity with sword and spear."

"Nay, fair guest, thou dost wrong the youth in that," interposed the baron. Our Edwin is no vulgar

braw'ler; that ugly wound came by an accident, and I will say for the lad that, had I a son of mine own, I would hold myself happy were he as good and as brave as Edwin, who is skilled alike in every warlike exercise and gentle science."

"Ay," said Sir Philip, "and among the rest, in the tongues, I deem, of France and Italy, which, mingled in the works of the troubadours, formed the true language of the romaunt."

"In sooth is he," responded the baron, "the proud lady of Anjou spoke not better French, nor our Holy Father the Pope purer Italian, than you shall hear from Edwin."

"And so please you, my lord," said the old seneschal, "I have learnt the wound on Edwin's forehead came by no mere accident, after all, but through the evil temper of Dickson, the armorer, who gave the youth uncourteous words, and then sprang on him with his dagger, and would have slain him had he not been prevented, and in the scuffle it was a buckler fell from the wall, and his brow was broken. But Edwin, who is but too generous and forgiving, told your lordship but half the truth, that he might screen Dickson."

"Let that Dickson be brought before us in the morning, good seneschal," said the baron. "And as for you, Edwin, the generosity which would spare so vindictive a fellow is a fault. But this mention of our domestic broils is ill entertainment of our courtly guest"

"Not at all, noble baron," replied Sir Philip, "since it showeth this fair Edwin is, in addition to all his worldly excellencies, a very saint in the forgiveness of injuries."

"With permission, most noble knight," exclaimed Edwin, casting upon Sir Philip so meaning a look, that the latter changed color, remembering, doubtless, the French conversation with his attendant Baldwin in the morning—"with permission, I cannot claim that most excellent of virtues. If I find that I have been cruelly and secretly wronged, though I may bear the wrong silently, I do not the less seek redress. But something too much of my poor fortunes is intruded on the noble company. Will it please my lord the baron that the mummers from York be admitted; they have just arrived at the Castle?"

"And clever knaves they are, Edwin," said the baron. "Let them appear, by all means."

Edwin bowed and left the hall, nor did he appear again during the evening. As for Amabel, she had remained silent and grave during this scene, and if she still continued so much to admire Sir Philip Harrington, there was at any rate no evidence of that admiration in her demeanor, as she listened with a grave air to his most sprightly sallies.

Before he retired to rest, the knight himself held in his chamber a long conference with his attendant Baldwin.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WEEK had elapsed since Sir Philip Harrington's visit to Clavering Castle. The knight had departed with his train, and the preparations for war were accelerated in the courts and armory. It was now known that Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond, was at the head of an army, including all the old Lancastrian party, and many of the supporters of the house of York. An eventful week had that been, too, with the dwellers at the castle, who had so long enjoyed a cheerful and undisturbed life, and the voice of lamentation was heard in the homesteads of the vassals, who too bitterly remembered the horrors of the civil war not to bemoan its renewal. War, indeed, is the most terrible of human calamities; and, though it is permitted by that Supreme Wisdom which sends forth also the pestilence and famine, yet those great conquerors, whose brilliant achievements are so glorified by the weak and imperfect minds of men, and who, like some devastating meteor, glitter only to destroy, must surely have a fearful account to render for the misery into which whole nations are plunged to gratify the cravings of their heartless ambition. The destruction of the fruits of honest industry; the promise of God's greatest blessing, the abundant harvest, trodden

down in the ear; the vineyards rooted up; the goodly trees levelled with the earth; the villages burned; the towns ransacked; the tears of the widow and the orphan; the blood of the slain; the groans of the wounded, as they lie festering on the battle-field—all, all cry out to heaven for vengeance, with a voice that will surely be heard in the latter day.

The poor people of England well might dread the renewal of a war so unnatural in itself, and which had now lasted so many years, and in which nineteen princes of the blood, and half the nobility had been slain. Richard the Third was, however, odious; and the proposal of a marriage between Elizabeth of York and Henry Tudor gave a hope that, could he dethrone King Richard, the dreadful dispute would at last be terminated.

This hope, however, was not the one entertained at Castle Clavering, whose lord took up arms in the cause of King Richard. As for the fortunes of the baron's dependants, they were contingent on the success of the cause which he espoused; many surmises were, however, afloat among the retainers as to the disappearance of Edwin, who had not been seen since he withdrew from the great hall on the evening of Sir Philip Harrington's arrival. As for the armorer, Dickson, he had been brought before the baron on the following morning, and ignominiously dismissed from his service. It was then, on the seventh day of Edwin's absence from the castle,

the morning rose fresh and dewy; and though the red streaks of early dawn yet lingered in the east, the birds were twittering among the boughs, and the deer, roused from their coverts, skimmed along the deep paths of the forest. The old hut of Siward, in the forest of Byland, so long abandoned, was little damaged in its outward aspect. The woodbine and honeysuckle, which Edwin had planted and trained round the doorway and casement, had knotted into thicker masses, and moss had grown over the threshold; otherwise, all was the same. It would seem the hut had a tenant, however, on that particular morning, for a hand issued from the casement, and severed from the stem a fragrant and dew-laden branch of the honeysuckle; a minute afterwards, two females issued from the covert of the woods, and crossed the glade to the old cottage. They seemed familiar with the spot, but the step of the younger of the two faltered as she stood in the doorway; then, as she advanced, she uttered a cry, and would have fallen, had not a youth, who was busy examining a parchment which he had apparently taken from a small box of cedar-wood which stood on an old table, sprang forwards to support her.

"Oh, Edwin!" said the young girl, who was indeed no other than the Lady Amabel herself, accompanied by her nurse Bertha, "have I offended you past forgiveness, that you have left the castle, even without wishing me farewell? You are about

to leave us for ever ; I know that from my father, and he says that you act rightly, and by the advice of the sub-prior, in so doing. Ah, Edwin, you are always right, and always ready to follow good and pious advice, and I am a headstrong, passionate girl, always doing wrong. And it was my vanity and bad temper that made me speak as I did of Sir Philip—it was to tease you ; I hate him, and if I live to be a woman, and my lord and father were to bid me marry him, I would take the veil first ! Therefore, Edwin, say that you will forgive me this last time, when you are going to leave us, as you have forgiven me so often before, when you lived in the castle ; and if I behaved ill to you to-day, I could make amends for it to-morrow !”

Edwin had not suffered Amabel to excuse herself at such length but that he was overwhelmed by painful emotions ; for the revelations contained in the parchments left by Siward, while they removed the difference of rank which had seemed hitherto to separate him from the Lady Amabel, imposed yet a more impassable barrier between them—the barrier of private injury, proceeding from political hate.

“ Dearest Lady Amabel, I have nothing to forgive !” stammered Edwin at length, in a broken tone.

“ Yes, you have, and you feel that you have !” answered Amabel, weeping, “ or you would not have been going to steal away so quietly, without one

farewell. Why, had it not been for nurse here questioning Roger, the falconer, who has always been so great a friend of yours, Edwin, and who owned at last that he had seen you, and that he was to meet you this morning to bid you farewell, why, I should not have seen you again, Edwin; and our Blessed Lady knows how hard I begged of nurse ere she would consent to bribe old Gilbert, the warder, that we might pass the gate, and come here to see you. Oh, it was cruel, it was cruel!"

"By my troth, and it was!" said the old nurse, weeping for company. "And Edwin, it was what I would not have thought of you, to leave the dear child and the old nurse, who both love you so, without one good-bye, and all for a foolish word. By my good patroness St. Anne, I thought, Edwin, thou wert more kindly natured!"

"Dear nurse," said Edwin, "in sooth, both thou and the Lady Amabel wrong me deeply! I felt no anger at aught the noble damsel said; and if I had, he must be more churlish in his nature than I think thou hast found me, whose displeasure would not have been more than appeased by a self-condemnation so frank, and so uncalled for, as the Lady Amabel's. We all have our faults, greater than hers; but who among us has the courage openly to confess them, and make apology for the wrong they do?"

"You forgive me, then, Edwin, and will come back with us to the castle, will you not?" inquired Amabel eagerly.

Edwin took her hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"At present, dear and generous Lady Amabel, I may not return to the castle, and my lord your father knows why, and holds me well excused. But!" added Edwin, in a more cheerful tone, "this prohibition may not perhaps last for ever. If the prayers of the charitable and the good are acceptable in the sight of Heaven, oh, surely, it will not; and then, dear nurse, whose kind word first made the poor Recluse of the Forest and his boy known to the Lady Amabel and her noble father,—then the Shepherd Boy may be permitted to show how sensible he was both of your kindness and the lordly generosity which it first invoked for him!"

"But when shall this be, Edwin?" inquired Amabel mournfully. "Oh, you speak as if you were going on some far journey, or as if long dreary years would pass ere we meet again!"

"Nay, I trust not, Lady Amabel, so please Heaven!" exclaimed Edwin, reverentially lifting his cap as he spoke. "No; with Heaven's good grace, these unhappy tumults, that have so long convulsed the land, shall, in a few months, nay, perhaps in a few weeks, be stilled for ever; and then, oh how pleased should I be again to seek the halls of Castle Clavering!"

"Ah, I understand it all now!" said Amabel with a sigh. "Your father, Edwin, that unfortunate Siward, was some noble Lancastrian, a partizan of the Red Rose. Oh, then all our happy days of com-

panionship are indeed over, for my father will never abandon the cause of York."

"Perhaps, sweetest Amabel, it will not need," returned Edwin, "and your noble father, without abandoning the cause of the White Rose, may cease to be the foe of those who bear the red one. Look here, fair Amabel, at the rustic altar which, by thy desire, I raised to our Blessed Lady: the rose is her flower, and I planted beside her altar both the white one and the red!"

As Edwin spoke, he took the hand of the young lady, and led her into the little garden of the cottage, where he had indeed, the preceding spring, raised an altar of turf to the Virgin; on either side of this altar had Edwin planted a red rose and a white one, and, mingled together, the lovely crimson buds just bursting from their covering of moss contrasted with the pale flowers the rivals of their beauty and their perfumes.

"See, dearest Lady Amabel," said Edwin, "how sweetly these flowers bloom side by side, how protectingly the strong stem of the red rose supports the fragile blossoms of the white; even so is the arm of the valiant Earl of Richmond the hope of the Red Rose, raised to protect from her cruel kinsman the rightful sovereign of the White Rose, the fair Elizabeth of York. The day is yet young, noble Amabel; shall we not, with our good nurse here, tell the rosary to the Queen of Saints, and gather the twin blossoms from her altar, with the

hope that she, the Mother of Mercy, will offer her all-powerful intercession in behalf of the union of the Red Rose and the White?"

Then the noble damsel and her old nurse, and the still unknown shepherd boy, knelt before the rural altar, and offered up their prayers to the sweet Virgin Mother, that she would vouchsafe her gracious influence that the cruel civil war might have an end, and the feud between the White and Red Roses be extinguished for ever! And when their prayers were over, Edwin twisted two branches laden with blossom from the rose trees, and divided them between himself and the Lady Amabel, and he fastened a white and red rose together in his cap, while the young girl placed the twin flowers in her girdle.

A few minutes afterwards Edwin was proceeding down one of the forest glades towards the monastery of St. Aldhelm, where Roger the falconer was to meet him, and Amabel lingered with her nurse at the entrance of the cottage, ever and anon waving her kerchief and dashing the tears from her eyes, as Edwin, again and again, paused on his way to turn and look behind.



CHAPTER IX.

It was the evening of the twenty-second of August, 1485, a day ever memorable in the annals of England; for on that day the glory of the greatest race of her rulers passed away, and the sun of the mighty Plantagenets set in blood. It needs not here to tell how the battle of Bosworth Field was lost and won; lost to Richard the Third by the treachery of the Stanleys, a treachery which was rewarded by Henry the Seventh, in whose behalf it was committed, by his ultimately putting to death the elder of the two, who was, besides, his own step-father, having married Margaret Beaufort, the widowed Countess of Richmond.

The clocks of the churches in the city of Leicester had just tolled the hour of nine, and the last faint streak of purple had died away in the west, while the mists of twilight gave place to the transparent obscurity of a magnificent summer night; millions of stars sparkled on the sky, among which the moon sailed, occasionally only obscured by a slowly-passing cloud; a soft breeze whispered among the boughs of the trees, and as it shook the dew from the drooping cups of the flowers, passed on, laden with perfume, and with the gentle sounds of the summer night, the buzz of the gnats in the thickets where the glow-worm bore his pale-blue light over

the green turf, or the trill of the nightingale on the bough.

But on the field of the late battle were other sights and sounds. Heaps of the slain, with a terrible look of defiance, seeming still to speak in their clenched teeth and filmy staring eyes; others so grim with clotted gore, that they were ghastly to contemplate; while the shifting light of the moon, as it trembled on their dead faces, seemed, at times, to endue them with motion, as if they lived. Nor were the sounds of the battle-field less frightful than its sights; the piteous groans of the poor men, who lay there with their wounds smarting in the night air, and parching with a thirst which they had no drop of water to alleviate; some of them maimed or crushed under the weight of the dead, or the bodies of their own slain horses. Some of these poor soldiers wept and prayed; others, alas! wicked and reckless men, such as are found in all armies, mingled the most shocking maledictions with their groans; the sobs and cries of women, too, were heard, as parties of them paced the field, seeking their fathers, brothers, and husbands, among the wounded and the slain; and, more frightful than all, the croak of the ravens, already battenning on their prey, or that which those who have heard it describe as the most fearful sound in nature, the yell of a wounded horse. The only alleviation of the horrors of this scene was to hear the chant of religion mingled with those hideous sounds from the

parties sent out by the superiors of the neighboring monasteries to attend to the hurts of the wounded and administer the last rites to the dying. But worse than the carrion birds, who brooded over the dead, were the wretches who, in human form, prowled about the field, carefully avoiding those spots where the gleaming taper and torch, and the chant of the hymn for the dying, made known the presence of the ministers of religion, and lurking in the deep shadows to strip the bodies of the slain, whether of the rich armor, jewels, or other valuables which they might have about them. Sometimes, too, these wretches, if they found a knight or a gentleman richly accoutred among the wounded, would themselves murder these unfortunates in order to secure the spoil.

Such, alas! are the scenes attendant upon what is called military glory, such the horrors for which great conquerors stand accountant; for the general aspects of war, the calamities which it causes, are the same now as when Edward III. and the Black Prince fought at Crecy, or when Henry VII. won the battle of Bosworth Field. About a mile distant from the field of battle there was a broad pleasant country lane, with hedgerows on either side; this lane terminated in a range of meadows, which, in a transverse direction, led to the town of Leicester. Many traces of the late conflict were in this lane, for by that route some scattered fugitives of the Yorkists had taken flight; broken plumes, pointless arrows, torn and

blood-stained scarfs, or pieces of armor, thrown off because the weight impeded the flight of the wearer were scattered at intervals. On the margin of a little brook, too, which murmured on one side the lane, was stretched the body of more than one unfortunate soldier, who had dragged his wounded frame there to slake his thirst and die.

Stealing cautiously along in the shadows, or skimming like a frightened fawn across the path which was lighted up by the full radiance of the moon, might, on that eventful evening, have been seen a young girl, accompanied by an elderly woman and a man, who had the air of a forester or other retainer of some great baron. This man appeared to have been a sharer in the late conflict, for the dint of blows was visible on his corselet, and the stout steel cap he wore on his head had not preserved him from a ghastly wound across the skull and forehead; this wound had been bound by a kerchief, but the blood soaking through the bandage had trickled down his face, and gave to features which, in health, were cheerful and well-formed, a grim and death-like expression.

Upon the arm of this man hung the elderly woman, and as they occasionally stumbled over the rough road, the young girl, who preceded them, would look impatiently back, and in a voice husky with apprehension, implore them to quicken their steps.

“There is time enough, sweet lady, time enough,”

answered the man, as the young lady, in turning again to speak to her followers, herself staggered and sunk down on a knoll of turf, for very weariness —“there is time enough; and in sooth, Lady Amabel, it likes me not the fashion of this Sir Philip Harrington’s message; he is waiting with my lord your father at the end of this lane, is he, and will guide you on your flight? By my reckoning, this path will not lead us into the open country, but rather into the city of Leicester, where the troops of Harry of Richmond are by this time carousing over their victory! Why not a message from my lord himself!”

“You forget, good Roger,” said Lady Amabel, for she it was who had accompanied her father from his castle, when he joined the army of Richard III. —“you forget, Sir Philip sent my dear father’s signet ring with the sad news that he was cruelly wounded.”

“Ay, my lady!” returned Roger the falconer, “and I remember me, too, that Sir Philip sent his message by that same rascal Dickson the armorer, whom he chose, for no good reason I guess, to take into his service when he was dismissed from that of my lord your father, for his attempt to cut the throat of good Master Edwin. Ah, this ugly gash I got on my head when my lord sent me to the sisterhood of St. Ursula this morning, to tell your ladyship that the battle was going against King Richard, has made me dizzy and stupid, or I had never let your ladyship and good nurse here leave the con-

vent. I pray you, my sweet young lady, go back. I doubt some treachery on the part of Sir Philip ; pray you go back."

"And abandon my father !" exclaimed Amabel, starting to her feet ; "leave him alone, exposed to this treachery of Sir Philip which you talk of. Roger ! never—let the fate of my father be what it will, I will share it. Turn back, if you please, and I will proceed alone with my nurse, or by myself, if she too fears to accompany me."

"My darling child," exclaimed the nurse, whom terror had almost deprived of the power of speech, "I beseech you take Roger's advice and go back to the good sisters."

"Go back if you will, nurse ! I shall go forward !" answered Amabel, with a touch of her old determination, resuming her rapid course down the lane.

"It shall never be said that I abandoned my young lady ; but sure I am my lord never sent word that she was to leave the secure shelter of the convent," ejaculated Roger, as he drew round the hilt of his heavy sword, and followed Amabel, carrying, rather than dragging, the nurse along with him. Scarcely, however, had the party emerged into the open meadows when the clash of arms was heard, and a man came staggering towards them, covered with blood, but bearing the accoutrements of a retainer of the Baron Fitz-Clavering. In the unclouded radiance of the moon, the broad meadow was visible as in the light of day, and the poor wounded

soldier recognizing Amabel and her companions, cried out as he approached them :

“Fly, good Roger, save our dear young lady ; my lord is surrounded yonder, wounded I fear unto death,—Sir Philip ! oh, treachery, treachery !”

Faintly gasping the last words, the faithful retainer fell dead at Amabel’s feet. The immediate vicinity of the contest chilled even the bold young heart of Amabel, and while the old nurse clung with screams of terror to the arm of Roger, she herself half turned to fly, when, with loud shouts, two horsemen separated themselves from the party contending in the centre of the meadow, and galloped towards them ; then the trembling limbs of Amabel refused to support her, and she sunk, half-fainting, on the ground. From this state of semi-consciousness she was roused by the renewed clashing of swords, and looking up, she perceived Sir Philip dismounted, and fighting fiercely with Roger, while his retainers lay apparently dead on the ground.

“Villain, serf !” exclaimed the knight, “yield, in the name of King Henry.”

“Never to thee, traitor, and stain to knighthood !” replied the valiant falconer, as his heavy sword severed the rivets of the knight’s cuirass, and he sank to the ground mortally wounded ; but ere Roger, raising the young lady, could bear her away, new actors appeared upon the scene, in the persons of a party of soldiers, headed by a young knight, who bore upon his shield and velvet surcoat the

blue and gold chequers and red fesse of the noble family of Clifford. The fray at the extremity of the meadow ceased on the appearance of this knight, some of the combatants submitting to his followers, and others taking to flight; he, on his part, had caught the words of Sir Philip, and rode up, exclaiming, "What late repentance is this? Who is it that cries in the name of King Henry, with the cognizance of the slain usurper Richard on his helmet?"

Amid all the horror and confusion of the scene, Amabel knew that voice, and, clasping her hands, with a shriek of joy she cried, "Oh Edwin, is it you? Are you, then, the young Lord Clifford of whom we have heard so much, who was hidden by his uncle after the battle of Tewkesbury? Oh dear Edwin, save me now, save my father from this false Sir Philip."



CHAPTER X.

THE Lady Amabel's apprehension of Sir Philip was causeless, for the trusty hand of Roger the falconer had meted out their earthly reward both to that false knight and the villainous Dickson who had aided him in the attempt to seize the Lady Amabel.

Meanwhile, some weeks had elapsed since the battle of Bosworth Field, and King Henry VII., the first sovereign of the race of Tudor, was seated in the council-chamber of the royal palace of Westminster. Most of the Lancastrian leaders of any fame were present, and among them, pale, as if from recent wounds, appeared one of the most distinguished supporters of the late sovereign, the Baron Fitz-Clavering, with his fair daughter Amabel hanging on his arm. Beside them stood the sub-prior of St. Aldhelm. Even in his youth, Henry VII. was a man of grave and stern character, but his manner was more gracious than his words, as he said, "By our Halidame, Lord Baron Fitz-Clavering, thou hast been an obstinate upholder of the perfidious tyrant of Gloucester; but as we believe thy faith in him was a mistake of conscience, and know thee withal to be a right valiant soldier, and man of noble spirit, we shall meddle neither with

thy lordships nor thy lands : seeing too, thou wast so gracious a protector of our well-beloved young knight and noble, Edwin Lord Clifford, and hoping that since thou art released by death from thy compact to bestow the hand of thy daughter on that false knight, Sir Philip Harrington, thou wilt overlook the unwitting share which the luckless Sir Hugh Clifford, the uncle of our Edwin, so long concealed with his nephew in Byland Forest, unhappily had in the death of thy noble wife."

"With permission of our lord the king, I have explained all that mournful affair to the Baron Fitz-Clavering," said the sub-prior of St. Aldhelm; "and as I was authorized by Sir Hugh on his deathbed, have made known his last confession, and the treachery of the father of Sir Philip Harrington, by whose hand, and not by that of the noble Lancastrian, the poor lady fell."

"A pair of traitors to every cause were, indeed, those Harringtons, father and son," said the king. "Dost thou know, reverend prior, that on the day of Bosworth, Sir Philip offered to deliver unto us both the Baron Fitz-Clavering and his daughter, at the same time that he sought the life of his cousin, the young Lord Clifford, that he might retain the lands which fall to that young lord in right of his mother, who was a sister of the mother of Sir Philip?"

"I have heard of this villany, gracious king," answered the sub-prior.

"And what says the Baron Fitz-Clavering," inquired the king, "of this knightly repute left by Sir Philip, and of the hopes of our trusty Clifford?"

"I say, my liege," answered the baron, "that though Sir Philip was the betrothed of my daughter he would not, even though the cause of King Richard had prospered, have become her husband; and of the young Lord Clifford, that even had his unhappy uncle been accountable for the death of my wife, the noble qualities of Edwin, and the sufferings of his childhood might well redeem his unwitting share in the blood of Sir Hugh."

"Well said, Lord Fitz-Clavering," answered the king. "Ah, we doubt not to find so sensible and good a man prove our own attached and faithful friend!" Then turning to one of his chamberlains, he bade him summon the Lord Clifford, and forthwith Edwin appeared, no longer clad in the poor habit of a shepherd boy, no longer mournful, yet bravely struggling with misfortune, but in the graceful costume of a noble of the time, in tissue of cloth of gold, and rich velvet, radiant with jewels, and with eyes that sparkled yet more brightly, in the consciousness of a virtuous youth, a heart uncantered by envy, a spirit that had never stooped to aught that was mean or base.

"Welcome, our dear Sir Edwin Lord Clifford, than whom a knight more worthy never bore a pennon," said the king, graciously extending his hand, which the young baron respectfully kissed.

"The Lord Fitz-Clavering will tell thee, Edwin," added the king, "that we have commended thee to his grace, seeing that in thy superabundant modesty thou wouldst not speak for thyself, though thy merits might alone recommend thee! However, modesty well becomes one who, with all his valor, is still a maiden knight."

"And is a most seasonable virtue in youth, my liege," said the sub-prior.

"And is a promise of wisdom in manhood!" observed the Baron Fitz-Clavering; "though truly, as our gracious sovereign has said, the merits of the Lord Clifford recommend themselves, and are worthy of any reward in my power to bestow; and I think my daughter Amabel hath been too much and too often the debtor to Edwin's courage and virtues to refuse tendering to him, at my command, all modest and maidenly acknowledgments of her gratitude."

The Lady Amabel blushed and hung her head as the baron spoke thus: but she was as grateful to Edwin as he could himself have desired, and became so excellent an imitator of his virtues, that those who knew her in after-years might have been at a loss to recognize the wilful Amabel Fitz-Clavering in the gentle Baroness Clifford.

